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A holy mission to Minnesota  
600 years ago





# A HOLY MISSION TO MINNESOTA 600 YEARS AGO









A HOLY MISSION TO MINNESOTA

600 YEARS AGO

by

Hjalmar R. Holand

Alexandria, Minnesota

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Photograph of the

KENSINGTON RUNESTONE

Now on Display in the Runestone Museum

Chamber of Commerce Building

Alexandria, Minnesota

Printed in U.S.A.



A NEW MUSEUM TO MICHIGAN  
AND YEARS AGO

by

Walter H. Hodge

Alexander's Museum

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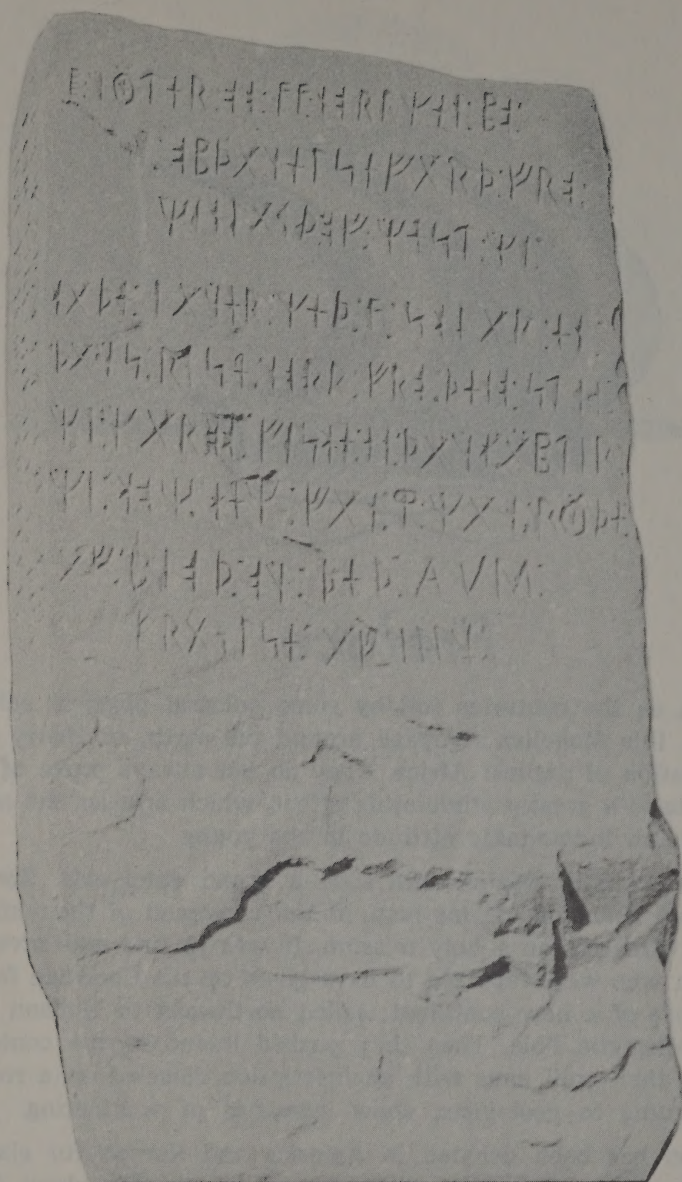
## *Preface*

Now and then as the centuries roll by some colossal physical achievement is made by man, like Magellan's voyage around the earth, or Henry Stanley's masterful penetration of darkest Africa. They do not always prove of practical value, but they have a greatly stimulating effect, which arouses the admiration of all and fosters an indomitable attitude in the young.

The history of America begins with such a grand enterprise. Six hundred years ago Sir Paul Knutson and his men, at the command of their king, sailed from Norway to America on a holy mission. It was to find and save some of their countrymen who were reported to have given up the Christian faith. They searched the shore of a new continent, sailed northward to Hudson Bay, and discovered the Magnetic Pole. Then they pushed inland to the center of the continent. There their trail ends with an inscription chiseled on a rock whose characters, according to geologists, show centuries of weathering.

This inscription has been debated in America and Europe for sixty years, and many books and hundreds of articles have been written about it. I have spent fifty years in the study of the evidence for and against the inscription. The following pages contain a brief synopsis of what I have learned about this subject.

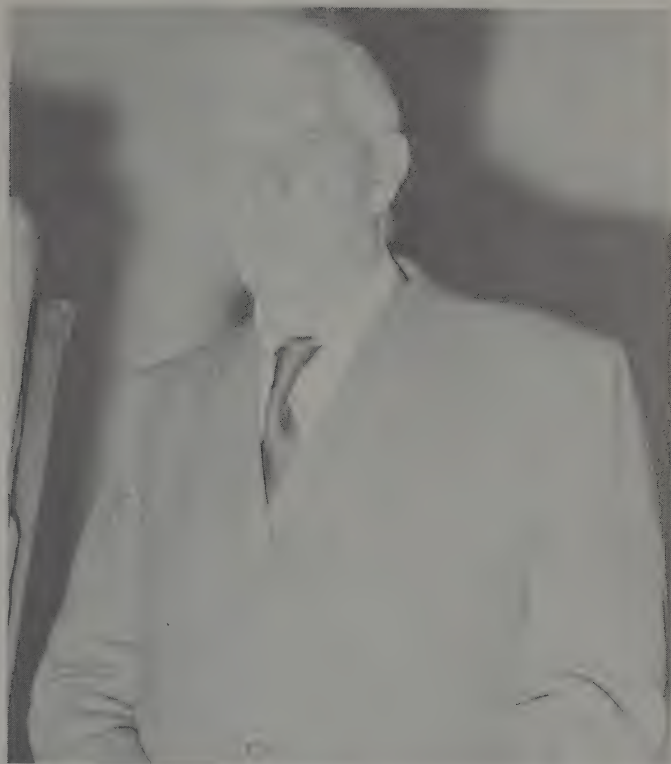
Hjalmar R. Holand



**Photograph of the  
KENSINGTON RUNESTONE**  
now on display in the  
**Runestone Museum**  
Alexandria, Minnesota



## About the Author . . .



**HJALMAR R. HOLAND**

This booklet contains information and reference material gained from over 50 years of study of Norse explorations in America before Columbus, a study whose evidence had to be found in the Sagas, in the archives and map rooms of many countries, in detailed philological and runological treatises, and in field trips to many places near and remote.

To clarify certain disputed points in medieval Norse inscriptions found in America, Mr. Holand studied thousands of medieval Scandinavian inscriptions and documents. To clarify the geographical data of the Sagas, he personally inspected every possible landing place along the Atlantic Coast from Manhattan to Gaspé. To study the Norse route through central Minnesota, he made endless trips along the waterways, gathering his evidence so carefully that he was able to predict, and later to find, the position of two previously undiscovered campsites.

Bit by bit Holand has been able to show that the very points on which the Runestone has been branded as a fraud were excellent proofs of its authenticity.

Mr. Holand now lives in Ephraim, Wisconsin. He is the author of about a dozen other historical works and scores of articles in historical and other publications.



Photograph of the  
**RUNESTONE MONUMENT**  
located at  
Alexandria, Minnesota



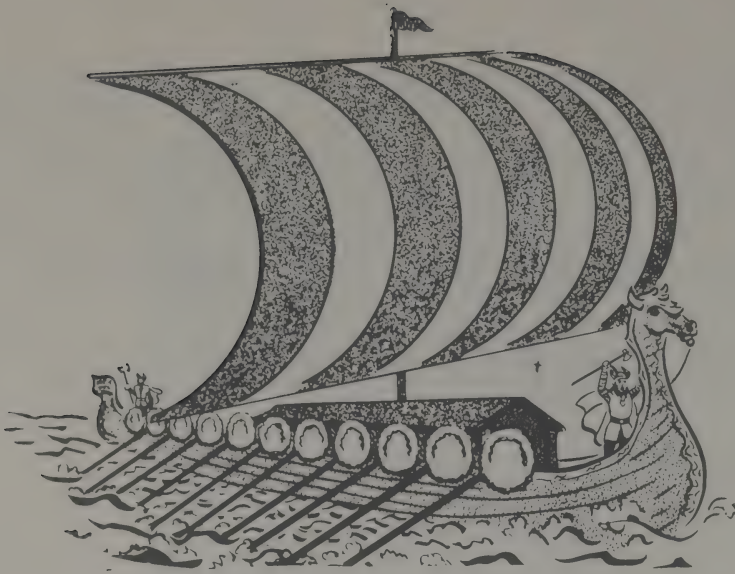
# *A Holy Mission To Minnesota 600 Years Ago*

By  
HJALMAR R. HOLLAND

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## *Contents*

- I. The Background
- II. Discovery of America  
Bjarni Herjulfson; Leif Erikson; Thorwald Erikson; Thorfinn Karlseyri
- III. Other Early Voyages  
The Honen Stone; Bishop Erik; The Seventeen Men from Markland
- IV. The Kensington Stone is Discovered  
The Re-discovery of the Kensington Stone
- V. Evidence on the Authenticity of the Inscription  
The Age of the Tree; The Reference to the Island; The Weathering of the Inscription
- VI. The Historical Evidence
- VII. Mooring Stones and Camp Sites
- VIII. Fourteenth Century Implements
- IX. The Testimony of Nicholas of Lynn
- X. Olof Ohman
- XI. Arguments Against the Inscription  
Miscellaneous Objections; Linguistic Objections; English Words;  
Runic Objections



## *I. The Background*

The first important appearance of the Scandinavians on the international scene was in the middle of the ninth century. In 862 a Swedish chief named Rurik was invited to be the chief of a tribe in Russia which had difficulty in maintaining itself against its savage neighbors. So strong were Rurik and his Swedish warriors that they not only saved the harassed tribe from destruction, but subdued other tribes and created a new empire which henceforth was known as Russian. It was ruled for several hundred years by Rurik's descendants, and they even made successful attacks against Constantinople.

While the Swedes were creating an empire in the east, the Norwegians and Danes carried on a great campaign of conquest in the west. The year 872 is the most significant date in Norwegian history. In that year King Harald the Fair-haired finished his campaign against the other kings in Norway and became its first undisputed sovereign. He was a capable but stern autocrat who usurped many privileges which the people held dear. The result was a mass emigration to other lands. Parts of England, Scotland and Ireland were conquered by Norwegian refugees. The islands of the west were discovered and peopled, and Iceland was quickly settled.

The coast of France suffered most from this upheaval. Here was wealth and beautiful estates in a pleasing climate. The most dreaded of these Norse Vikings was Rolf, the son of Duke Ragnvald, King Harald's best friend. Rolf had seized some cattle without due process of law, and the King declared him an outlaw although his mother, the Duchess, pleaded for her son on her knees. As Rolf was now a man without a country, he decided to win one of his own. He assembled a large fleet of Vikings, sailed up the Seine River, and laid siege to Paris. As the French King was powerless to cope with him, he finally bought peace by giving Rolf a large part of northern France which was thereafter known as Normandy. About a century later Rolf's descendant, William the Conqueror, led an army in part of Norse origin, across the British Channel and conquered England.

The tremendous upheaval which was caused by King Harald's stern rule did not always result in warfare. Many of Norway's best men emigrated to Iceland, and there, far from the turmoil of Europe, they and their descendants turned to writing and created a remarkably fine literature. In view of its very small population, no country since ancient times can compare with Iceland in the volume and quality of its literary production.



## II. Discovery of America

Iceland has only a small amount of tillable land, and it was soon filled up. One of the last to arrive was Erik Thorwaldson, a member of the Bodyguard of Earl Hakon who then ruled Norway. As all the good land was taken, Erik sailed westward and discovered Greenland. Columbus' discovery of America is said to date from his landing on San Salvador, October 12, 1492. But Greenland lies even closer to the American mainland than does San Salvador, and it is a thousand times larger, so it is equally proper to say that America was discovered in 982.

In 985 Erik returned to Iceland to report on his discovery, and so favorable was his description that when he the next year returned to Greenland, he was accompanied by twenty-five shiploads of emigrants. (1) However, they had a very stormy passage and eleven ships were lost.

### Bjarni Herjulfson (2)

There was a seafaring Icelandic merchant named Bjarni Herjulfson who was accustomed to spend every alternate winter with his father. In the Fall of 986 he returned and was told that his father had emigrated to an unknown land called Greenland. Bjarni spent a week to learn as much as possible about the location and appearance of this new country and then set out to join his father. But he was tossed about by prolonged storms. Eventually he sighted a new land which was far south and not at all like what he had been told about Greenland. As it was late in Fall and as he wanted to reach Greenland before the harbors froze up, he did not land but eventually he reached Greenland and found his father.

### Leif Erikson

At that time Leif, the son of Erik, was only a child; but about fifteen years later, when he was traveling around in Greenland with priests to tell the people about Christianity, as was his commission from King Olaf Trygvesson, he heard the story that Bjarne had seen new timbered lands far to southwest. Being an unusually keen and enterprising young man, Leif bought Bjarni's ship, probably hired some of the men who had accompanied Bjarni, and set out to find this land in 1003. He was successful and found a most pleasing land which abounded in grapes and grapevines, and therefore called it Vinland which means Wineland. He also describes its location.

Some commentators think that Leif did not go so far south as to find grapes. They therefore think that **vinbar** means some kind of cranberry, dewberry, blackberry or other northern berry. But they overlook the fact that the chief item that Leif found was the **vine** of the grape. **Vinvid** means grape withie. While grape vines make the best of withies, the vines of other berries that have been substituted are no good for withies. The Greenlanders had no bast or linen with which to make rope. They used ropes of hides, but this material is not well suited when exposed to wetness. As there was a constant need for withies, a cargo of **vinvid** from Vinland was worth a small fortune. (3)

Most commentators agree that Vinland was on the south coast of New England. I have followed this coast many times, and am convinced that this conclusion is correct. Mr. Frederick J. Pohl was the first to find the exact spot where Leif Erikson spent the winter. This was on the shore of Follins Pond at the head of a tidal river (Bass River) as mentioned in the old saga. (4)

(1) One report says there were thirty-five ships.

(2) The facts and quotations in this chapter are all from *FLATEYJARBOK*, Ed. 1860 vol. III, 538-549, ms. of about 1380, except the section dealing with Thorfin Karlsevni which is from *HAUKSBOK*, ms. of ca. 1320. A more detailed account is given in H. R. Holand, *Explorations in America Before Columbus*, 1956, pp. 19-79.

(3) W. Hovgaard, *VOYAGES OF THE NORSEMEN*, p. 159.

(4) *THE LOST DISCOVERY*, 1952, Ch. 6; H. R. Holand, *EXPLORATIONS IN AMERICA*, 1956, pp. 42-47.

### **Thorwald Erikson**

Leif returned to Greenland the next summer and was praised highly, but his younger brother, Thorwald, thought that Leif had not explored the new country as much as he should. Leif apparently agreed with him, because he told Thorwald to take his ship and helped him get started.

Thorwald set out in the late summer of 1004, but made no explorations that Fall. It was necessary to lay in food supplies and plenty of fuel for the winter. The next spring (1005) he took the 'afterboat' with some men because the water was shallow. This course was westward, and his description agrees in all details with the natural conditions along the south coast of New England as they are now.

The next spring (1006) he took the ship, leaving some of the men in charge of the camp. He now sailed eastward and then northward, which describes the shorewise course from Bass River. While following this course, a sudden storm arose and flung the ship on a cape, breaking the keel which made necessary a new one. This cape was presumably the northern part of Cape Cod because the explorers would not know that they were on a cape until they saw its end. At Thorwald's suggestion, the broken keel was raised on end for the guidance of future mariners.

Thorwald then sailed away from the land and followed a shore eastward. This shows that they were following the coast of Maine. They entered some fjord openings nearby and moored their ship in lee of a big timbered headland. Here they put out a gangway and all went ashore. Thorwald was highly pleased with this location and exclaimed: "Here it is beautiful! Here I will build my home!"

But Thorwald, the first white man to select a home site in America, did not build a house. Before the sun set the explorers got into trouble with the natives and Thorwald was killed. Somewhere on a headland on the coast of Maine lie his bones, but the exact spot is uncertain because we do not know the location of the "nearby fjord openings." His companions returned to Leif's camp, and the next year they returned to Greenland with a valuable cargo of grapevines.

### **Thorstein Erikson**

The next year, 1008, Thorstein, the youngest of the Erikson brothers, set out in the same vessel. He was very religious, and his purpose was to bring back his brother's body to bury it in consecrated ground. But he was tossed back and forth by storms all Summer and Fall. Finally, late in the year, he returned to Greenland and died the following winter.

### **Thorfinn Karlsevni**

Apparently news of 'Vinland the Good' quickly reached Iceland because about this time two large ships, each carrying forty men, arrived in Eriksfjord in Greenland. The leader of this company was Thorfinn Karlsevni, a man of distinction who was also reported to be wealthy. The most important visitors were invited to stay with Leif Erikson, who now upon the death of his father was the Governor and Lawspeaker in Greenland, and lodgings were found for the others. As these visitors arrived in Fall, they remained until the following midsummer when the harbors finally opened.

At this time the later famous Gudrid, the widow of Thorstein, was staying with Leif, whose ward she was. As was to be expected, Thorfinn fell in love with the very gifted young woman, and they were married the following winter. There was much talk about the many good qualities of Vinland and this resulted in an expedition of 160 men, including some women, as Gudrid went with her husband. It is probable that most of these people intended to settle in Vinland because they brought cattle and stayed three years, but finally returned because of the hostilities of the natives.

It is possible to determine the location of the headquarters of this expedition. The old saga describes their voyage thus:



They sailed southward a long time along the coast and came upon a cape . . . It was a harborless shore, with long sandy beaches . . . On the cape they found the keel of a ship and called the cape Keelness. The sandy beaches they called **Furdustrandir** because it seemed ominous and it took so long to sail past them. Then they turned their ships into a bay.

This description shows that they were approaching Leif's camp. But they would not settle there because they were no doubt familiar with Erik Thorwaldson's procedure of giving his friends large areas of land so that there would be no crowding. They therefore left plenty of space for Leif's domain and continued westward. As the saga says:

They sailed away on their course, until they reached a place where the shoreline was indented by a fjord and they sailed into this fjord. At the mouth lay an island washed by swift ocean currents . . . Sailing up the fjord, they called it Streamfjord . . . They had brought all kinds of livestock, and now they turned them out to grass. There were mountains there and the country was beautiful to see.

There is only one place on the Atlantic coast southwest of Cape Cod where a fjord is to be found with an island at its mouth, washed by swift ocean currents, and mountains not far away. This is Harlem River at the north end of Manhattan Island. This 'river' is a true fjord with steep cliffs rising hundreds of feet from the salt water and still higher mountains in the background. At the mouth of this fjord was an island, now removed, and the entrance was called Hell Gate which name is reminiscent of the ancient terrors of its waters, the 'swift ocean currents'. (5)

Here, on the site of the world's greatest city, the first emigrants in America, 160 in number, built their headquarters and remained for three years, almost a thousand years ago.

(5) For seventeenth century descriptions of Hell Gate, see H. R. Holand. **EXPLORATIONS IN AMERICA BEFORE COLUMBUS**, p. 354, note 14.



### III. Other Early Voyages To Vinland

#### The Honen Stone

The earliest mention of Vinland is not found in the sagas of Iceland, but on a stone inscribed with runic characters unearthed in Norway. This is known as the Honen Stone, and its inscription, according to the runologist, Sophus Bugge, dates from about 1050. It is a six-line stanza in the old *malahattr* meter. In English prose it reads: "Far and wide they were driven from the coast of Vinland, and were cast on the ice of the uninhabitable regions, needing food and clothing. Evil fate may overtake one so that he dies early." The inscription is not complete, the stone being broken in two.

As Bugge says, this is an epitaph over a young man of good birth, otherwise a memorial in verse would hardly have been raised to him. This indication of family eminence is supported by the still existing local tradition that the estate of Honen, formerly much larger, was in olden times a royal seat. It is not far from the little city of Honefoss in Ringerike.

This nobleman who probably was the first to make a direct trip from Norway to America was Thronð Halfdanson, a grandson of King Olaf Haraldson, also known as St. Olaf. At this time (1047) Norway was ruled jointly by two kings. One was Magnus, later called the Good, who was a son of King Olaf. The other was Harald the Ruthless, so called because of his vindictive temperament. He was a half brother of King Olaf. When he in 1045 returned to Norway laden with riches, the proceeds of ten years' plunder as captain of the Imperial Guard in Constantinople, his ambition was to become the sole ruler of Norway. In this, however, he met with much opposition. He largely blamed his own nephew, Thronð Halfdanson, for this. However, after a year or so King Magnus who was very generous offered to share the kingship with Harald.

But this did not satisfy King Harald who was implacable in his hatred. Several times he sent men to kill Thronð, but was prevented by King Magnus' vigilance. Finally King Magnus became fearful that King Harald would accomplish his purpose. He therefore suggested that Thronð make a visit to the new lands in the west, Greenland and perhaps Vinland. The latter did so, but as recorded on his gravestone, he perished on the voyage. (1)

#### King Harald's Voyage

King Harald also made an attempt to visit Greenland and Vinland. It is possible that his purpose was to add two rich colonies to his dominions, but it is more according to his character that his main purpose was to remove his nephew who was a possible rival to the crown. However, King Harald also came very near losing his life on this voyage. It is described by Magister Adam who got his information from King Svein of Denmark and is recorded in his great history of the Hamburg Archbishopric written about 1070.

'After which island (Wineland), said he (King Svein) no habitable land is found in that ocean, but all that is beyond is full of intolerable ice and utter darkness .

. . . This was lately tested by King Harald, prince of the Norsemen, who, when investigating with his ships the breadth of the northern ocean, hardly escaped with safety from the awful gulf of the abyss by turning back, when at length the bounds of the earth where it ends grew dark before his eyes.' (2)

(1) This story is told with much detail in *FLATEYJARBOK*, III. 314-316. An English translation is given in H. R. Holand, *EXPLORATIONS IN AMERICA*, pp. 79-88.

(2) *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, Ch. IV. p. 38



## **Bishop Erik Goes to Vinland**

As the existence of Vinland the Good became known, not only to the people of Greenland and Iceland, but also in Norway, Denmark and Germany, it seems probable that many other people besides those mentioned above would attempt to see this highly praised land in the west. This would seem desirable, particularly to the people of Greenland who lived in a land of many limitations and who had not far to go. But the early historical records of Greenland were lost when its two settlements were destroyed by the Eskimo, with the exception of the narrative about the Erikson family which was copied by Icelandic clerks because so many prominent Icelanders are mentioned. It is therefore reasonable to assume that voyages to Vinland were also made by members of other families besides the Erikson family.

This conclusion is supported by the fact that Erik Gnupson, the first bishop in Greenland, in 1121 sailed away to Vinland. What was his purpose? As bishop of sixteen parishes, two monasteries and a nunnery, he no doubt had plenty to do. As he presumably had little interest in going on a tour of adventure, and as the voyage to Vinland was long and dangerous, the only reasonable purpose would be that he had been informed that there were countrymen in Vinland who needed his priestly attention. John Fiske says that in 1112 Erik Gnupson was appointed by Pope Paschel II "Bishop of Greenland and Vinland in partibus infidelium," (3) and Claudius Lyschander, Royal Historian of Denmark, says that Bishop Erik both colonized and evangelized Vinland. (4) We have no other evidence that he returned to Greenland, but Lyschander says Bishop Erik died in 1146 and was buried beneath the floor of the Gardar Cathedral in Greenland.(5)

## **The Seventeen Men From Markland**

There is other evidence that Vinland was not forgotten and that trips to the American mainland were made from time to time. These were not recorded in Iceland because there was almost no traffic between Greenland and Iceland. As both countries produced the same products, neither of them had anything to sell which the other country was in want of. A man from Greenland was therefore seldom seen in Iceland or vice versa. But in 1347 a small Greenland ship arrived in an Iceland harbor. There were seventeen men on board and they came from Markland, (Nova Scotia), where they presumably went to get timber. On their return trip they were storm driven to Iceland. This is recorded in six different annals. Evidently this business of going to Nova Scotia for timber was common practice because the annalist shows not the least surprise.(6)

These men from Greenland had important news to report. It was so important that when one of the chiefs in Iceland heard it, he felt that they should report it to the King. So he provided lodgings for them for the winter and in Spring he found a ship and took them to King Magnus of Norway. To him the Greenlanders reported that four small parishes of Norse people in western Greenland had disappeared. Where had they gone to? Why did they go? No one knew. The results of this visit is told in Chapter IV which follows:

(3) THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA, 1891, I. p. 2-22. The same statement was made by Rev. Luca Jeles in 1891 before an international Catholic congress.

(4) GRONLANDS HISTORISKE MINDESMERKER, III, p. 897.

(5) DEN GRONLANDSKE CHRONICA, Ed. of 1726, p. 26.

(6) There is mention of two men, Grim and Sorli, who about 1200 brought a shipload of lumber or timber from Greenland to Iceland. This must have come from Markland. See Thule, Vol. 24, Ch. 5, no. 2.



## IV. The Kensington Stone Is Discovered

Shortly after New Year's Day, 1898, the University of Minnesota was informed that a stone containing a long inscription in unknown characters had been found near Kensington, Douglas County, Minnesota. The information was sent by S. A. Siverts, the manager of the Bank of Kensington. He also sent a copy of the inscription, made by him. This copy came to the attention of O. J. Breda, Professor of Scandinavian languages in the University.

But while Breda was a scholarly man, he knew very little about runic writing. In the University Library were some books containing runic inscriptions, and by help of these he made a partial translation. However, no less than fifteen words baffled him, including all the numerical signs. He was therefore unable to read the date, the last word in the inscription. However, he found the word **Vinland**. This reminded him of Leif Erikson, and he concluded that the inscription purported to tell something about Leif's discovery. But in that case the inscription could not be authentic because the Old Norse language of Leif Erikson's time was very different from the language on the stone. After six weeks of study, he made a report concluding with a statement that the inscription was a hoax. This was printed in the **Minneapolis Journal**, Feb. 22, 1899.

In the meantime someone in Kensington had heard that the Northwestern University was a great school, and at his recommendation the stone was sent to Evanston. Here it was placed in the office of G. O. Curme, head of the Germanic Department. He had the stone for three weeks and was favorably impressed with the weathered appearance of the inscription. He also made a public report to this effect and attempted a translation of the inscription which was inferior even to Breda's. Later, after much correspondence with Breda, he yielded to the latter's supposedly greater knowledge and concluded that the inscription was a forgery.

This was also the conclusion reached in Oslo. It is said that Mr. Breda sent a copy of his findings to some professors in Oslo together with a sketch map showing Minnesota to be lying near the center of the North American continent. This was enough for the professors in Oslo. They could think of no possible reason why anyone should seek to penetrate to the center of the continent back in Leif Erikson's time, and felt confident that such an attempt would be without success. They therefore did not bother with the inscription but sent word that it was a huge fraud. This put a sudden end to the investigation of the inscription.



## The Re-discovery of the Kensington Stone

Nine years later I was up in central Minnesota gathering material for my book on the History of the Norwegian Immigration which was published the following year. I had heard nothing about the discovery of the Kensington Stone nine years earlier, because I was then in college, busy with a thesis which had to be written to obtain a Master's degree, and I had little time for newspapers. But when I got up into the little settlement north of Kensington, every man I spoke with had something to say about a mysterious stone with an inscription which no one could read. I was told to go and see Mr. Ohman who found the stone and still had it, and I did.

I found him to be a tall man of about fifty years, frank and upright, and with a quiet dignity. He had come from Helsingland in Sweden 16 years before he found the stone and had spent all his time among Swedes so he could speak very little English. He showed me the stone and told me about the circumstances of its discovery. This visit was a most interesting event, because I had studied a number of runic inscriptions the year before, and here I saw a real artistic specimen. Ohman did not seem to be as much interested as I expected he would be. He said: "The learned say this inscription is a fake, but that is something I can't understand. These few Swedes and Norwegians here are all simple men like myself with very little schooling, and none of them know anything about runes and such mysteries. But then the scholars say it is a fake, and they ought to know." I offered him five dollars for the stone, but he would not accept it. He said: "You are probably just as poor as I am. You can have it for nothing. If the scholars are right, I'd hate to think I had charged you five dollars for nothing."

A few weeks later when I returned home, I found the stone had come in good condition. In much excitement I sat down with pencil and paper and a reference book. Some of the signs were new to me, but it was easy to determine their identity by the context. The numerals also were new, but the system was simple and easily solved. Before long the translation was completed. Here it is: (1)

**(We are) 8 Goths (2) and 22 Norwegians on (an) exploration journey from Vinland through the west. We had camp (by a lake with) 2 skerries one day's-journey north from this stone. We were (out) and fished one day. After we came home (we) found 10 men red with blood and dead. A V M Save (us) from evil!**

On the edge of the stone are the following words:

**(We) have 10 men by the sea to look after our ships 14 days'-journeys from this island. (In the) year (of our Lord) 1362.**

There was the date, 1362! And the inscription had been rejected because it was not written in the language of the year 1000! What sort of scholarship was this?

I wrote an article for a newspaper presenting the first complete translation of the inscription, which showed that it had been rejected on false evidence. This was followed by other articles in which I described the circumstances of the discovery and evidence that the stone must have been in its finding place long before the first settlers came. This brought on a flood of articles pro and con with many lamentable reflexions on the unspeakable audacity of a certain young man who dared to question the infallibility of the experts of Oslo University.

(1) The words in parenthesis are omitted in the inscription There are no punctuation marks.

(2) People of West Gothland, Sweden.

## V. Evidence on the Authenticity of the Inscription

The great westward invasion by pioneers reached the southeastern tip of Minnesota in 1850. By 1862 it had taken possession of the southern one-third of the later state, the frontier edge having reached the southern part of Pope County south of Glenwood.

But in that year the Sioux Indians decided to drive the white men out of Minnesota. They were resentful over broken promises and the failure to get the promised annuities. Like a flash of lightning they fell upon the scattered pioneers, killed six hundred of them and drove ten times that many east and south into Wisconsin and Iowa. Troops were called out and the war lasted three years with a loss of about a thousand soldiers.

It took some time before people ventured to return to their devastated homes, but in 1867 a new flood of land seekers swept in. In that year the first settlers in Douglas County came. They were a small group of Norwegians and Swedes who settled north of the later Kensington in Solem township. It never became a big settlement because the surrounding area consists largely of hilly, stony moraines and many marshes. In 1881 came Olof Ohman who later found the rune stone. He was born in Helsingland, Sweden, in 1855. The land he bought was very hilly, and he was the first to attempt to make a farm of it. Two years later came Nils Flaten from Telemarken who took the adjoining tract which also was very hilly and swampy.

### The Age of the Tree

The inscribed Stone was found underneath a tree. The roots which held it fast were flat where they came in contact with the Stone which showed that the Stone had been in that spot at least as long as the tree had stood there.

In 1909 Dr. Knut Hoegh, a famous surgeon in Minneapolis, and I went to Kensington to investigate the circumstances relating to the find. We talked with about a dozen men who had all seen the stump of the tree and the flattened roots which had held the Stone. We obtained five affidavits which describe the weathered appearance of the inscription and the size of the tree. (1) The next step was to determine the age of the tree which all the affidavits in substance had described as being from eight to ten inches in diameter, or an average of 9.2 inches.

For this purpose we asked Mr. Ohman to cut down a tree of the same size so we could get a cross section of it and count the annual rings of growth. He was unable to find any of the right size on the hill where the stone was found, but finally found two down in a hollow, where the soil was moist and rich, but he objected that as these trees were healthy, they did not correctly represent the tree under which the stone was found, which was stunted and sickly. In lieu of anything better, these trees were cut down and marked A and B. Later he found a stunted tree which in its growth, but not in its size, resembled the "runestone tree." A cross section of this was cut and marked C.

These cross sections were given to Professor N. H. Winchell, State Archeologist, who caused them to be dried and varnished. When this was done the annual growth-rings appeared distinctly and showed the following number: A, 37 rings; B, 42 rings; and C, 38 rings. At least five years must be added to each for the decayed and blurred center, the rings of which could not be counted. These cross sections are now in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. (2)

(1) These are all printed in H. R. Holand, *THE KENSINGTON STONE*, 1932, pp. 34-37, 292-295; They are also printed in Holand *WESTWARD FROM VINLAND*, 1940, pp. 110-113.

(2) Photographs of these cross sections, slightly reduced because of page limits, are printed in Holand, *THE KENSINGTON STONE* 1932, opposite pp. 38- 39 and 40.



We now have seven estimates on the size of the tree in question, range from 8½ to 10 inches in diameter. The mean average of these seven estimates is 9.2 inches at the stump. As C with a diameter of 5.5 inches at the stump was 43 years old, a tree having a diameter of 9.2 inches would be 72 years old.

This was a higher age than we expected, and we decided to check the figures by some other test. Fortunately the Department of Agriculture has published two pamphlets on the growth of aspens. (3) These studies show that in Maine, with a rainfall of 41 inches, a third quality tree 8 inches in diameter breast high is 68 years old, but in Utah with a rainfall of only 12 inches a tree of this diameter is 115 years old. As breast high diameter is reckoned about one inch less than the stump diameter, the tree under discussion therefore had a breast high diameter of 8 inches. Minnesota has a rainfall of only 26 inches, which means a slower growth than in Maine. If five percent is allowed for this slower growth we arrive at 71 years or a little more for the age of the tree which stood above the inscribed stone. This is very close to the result reached by our own inspection.

The Forestry Bureau Tables mentioned above are printed in my book **The Kensington Stone**, pp. 37-43 and also photographic reproductions of the cross sections cut by Mr. Ohman.

We find by these two independent studies that the tree which grew above the stone was at least seventy years old. This brings us back to 1827. This was twenty years before immigration to Minnesota began. It was forty years before there were any settlers in Douglas County where this stone was found and fifty four years before Olof Ohman came to America.

### **The Reference to "This Island"**

The inscription refers to the finding place of the Stone as an island ("14 days-journeys from this island"). No one would now think of calling the elevation where the Stone was found an island, because it is merely a slight rise on a rolling prairie. Nor was it an island when the first settlers came. In 1866, the year before they came, this part of the county was surveyed by government surveyors and a plat was made showing every elevation, lake, swamp, watercourse, and grove of timber. This plat has been preserved. Each square represents a square mile of land, and a mile south and quarter mile east from the section number "14" is shown the steep hill of Ohman's farm marked by a serrated line. On the east side of this line is a long line marked "bog". In other words, we find that in 1866 the land was just the same in appearance as it is now except for the buildings and highways which have been constructed since then. To change any part of this area into an island would require some tilting of the surface of the land. Is there any probability that any such disturbances of the topography has taken place?

Yes. When the last glacier spread a blanket of ice, many thousand feet thick, over Canada and the northern states of our country, this tremendous weight depressed the surface of the earth several hundred feet according to the weight of the glacial ice. Later, when the ice melted, the surface sprang back again in a series of upheavals. In most places little is known of the height of these successive upheavals, but in northwestern Minnesota we have very specific information because of the fact that the broad Red River valley was once a great glacial lake. The valley extends from the continental divide at Browns Valley, Minnesota and slopes northward about 400 miles to Lake Winnipeg. When the southern part of the glacier melted, the valley became a great lake because the outlet in the north remained closed for a long period. This former lake left thirty-one broad and high beaches which mark the boundaries of the lake at successive periods.

(3) Dept. of Agriculture, **FOREST SERVICE BULLETIN** No. 93, p. 17; "Aspen in Central Rocky Mountain Region," U. S. Dept. of Agric. **BULLETIN**, 1291, Feb. 20, 1925 p. 6.

These lines of beaches are not truly horizontal as one would expect, but have an upward tilt to the north, averaging a little more than a foot per mile. Thus, we find the great Herman beach, which marks the highest level of the glacial lake, is 1055 feet above the sea at Lake Traverse, the southern outlet of the lake, and 1182 feet at Maple Lake, 120 miles farther north. These measurements prove that the earth's crust at a much later time was subjected to a series of uplifts which raised it 127 feet in this distance.

According to Dr. Upham, (5), each of these 31 successive beaches is the result of a new upheaval because they are not truly parallel with each other, but follow slightly different angles of incline. There are also some irregularities in the altitude of the beaches which indicate minor local disturbances.

These many upheavals and other disturbances must have taken many thousand years because they successively built up very wide and high beaches (300 to 400 feet wide and 15 to 20 feet high) and also vast deltas covering many hundred square miles. The latest upheaval may therefore well have taken place within the last 500 years. In fact, Professors L. E. Martin (6) and F. T. Thwaites and Dr. Upham all say that these upheavals and tiltings are going on at the present time. As the Kensington Stone was found only fifteen miles east of the great Herman beach, it is probable that the oscillations of the nearby surface closely followed the pattern recorded by the beaches. Professor N. H. Winchell, State Geologist of Minnesota, writes:

I am convinced from the geological conditions and the physical changes which the region has experienced, probably during the last 500 years, that the stone contains a genuine record of a Scandinavian exploration into Minnesota, and must be accepted as such for the date named. (7)

### **The Weathering of the Inscription**

It is a known fact that the Stone when found lay a little below the surface of the ground. It must also have been covered by soil in 1827 (or thereabout), because the seed which then began to grow into the tree above it required a layer of moist soil for germination and growth. It is also known that the stone when found lay with the inscribed face down. (8) It follows that during these seventy years before the stone was found, the inscription was protected from the action of the elements and suffered little or no weathering. The Geological Survey of the Department of the Interior writes me that:

The weathering of stones is mainly chemical and takes place only at the surface of the ground. The stones may, therefore, be perfectly fresh and unaltered until they are exposed for a time at the surface to the corrosive action of rainfall containing acids absorbed from the atmosphere and surface soils. (9)

This means that whatever weathering the inscription shows was not produced during the 70 years it lay beneath the tree, but was a carry-over from an earlier period when the inscription was exposed to the elements.

The inscription shows much weathering. Dr. Warren Upham, who had the stone in his office for more than a year, writes: (10)

When we compare the excellent preservation of the glacial scratches shown on the back of the stone, which were made several thousand years ago, with the mellow time-worn appearance of the face of the inscription, the conclusion is inevitable that this inscription must have been carved many hundred years ago.

(5) Warren Upham, *GLACIAL LAKE AGASSIZ*, Ch. 9.

(6) *THE PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY OF WISCONSIN*, 1932, Bulletin No. 36, p. 464.

(7) *JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY*, 1910, IV., p. 180.

(8) "The Kensington Rune Stone, Report of the Minnesota Historical Society's Committee," 1910, printed in *MINN. HIS. SO. COLLECTIONS*, Vol. XV, p. 221.

(9) The statement is made in a letter from the Geological Survey to the writer, dated Feb. 25, 1952. Professor Winchell, State Geologist in Minnesota, makes a similar statement. See Museum Committee's Report in *M.H.S. COLLECTIONS* Vol. XV, p. 235.

(10) The statement is on file in the office of the Secretary of the Minnesota Historical Society.



Professor N. H. Winchell, secretary of the committee appointed to investigate the merits of the inscription, discusses the weathering at length and concludes that the inscription was probably 500 years old. (11)

These statements were made in 1909 and 1910 when the philologists were going strong against the inscription. The stone was then lying in the office of the secretary of the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul for the convenience of the committee appointed to investigate it. Many geologists inspected it but none found any reason to believe that the inscription was of recent origin. W. O. Hothkiss, State Geologist of Wisconsin, volunteered the following statement: (12)

After having carefully examined the so-called Kensington runic stone I have no hesitation in affirming that the inscription must have been carved very long ago—at least fifty to a hundred years.

Professor O. E. Hagen of South Dakota University, who became famous for his skill in testing the patina of cuneiform tablets, also came to inspect the inscription. He prepared to write a dissertation on the inscription, but unfortunately his house burned down and his notes were lost. He also suffered severe injuries which caused his death. Shortly before he passed away he wrote a letter to a friend who was editor of a weekly in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in which he says in part: (13)

In epigraphic respects I find in the inscription no evidence that it is anything except what it purports to be. I worked over the stone for a whole day under different kinds of light and found the runes on the whole to be what I looked for from that time and the people that are mentioned in the inscription . . . My advice is therefore that the Kensington Stone be placed in a safe repository where it can be preserved as an important epigraphic document concerning American history.

As an offset to this evidence Dr. Brondsted in 1948 called attention to an H which I in 1908 carved on the lower end of the stone as a future check on the weathering process. He says that this carving shows a beginning of weathering (*en begyndende forvittringshud*). (14). Then he reasons: "If it takes 40 years to produce a light patina, one may well conclude that a full patina could be produced in a period of 70-80 years, and the evidence claimed in the patina is no evidence." (15)

This is not very good reasoning. The stone had a full patina when it was found in 1897. This is testified to by all the affiants mentioned above. Olof Ohman said: "The inscription when found had a weathered appearance which to me appeared just as old as the untouched parts of the stone." Nils Flaten said: "The inscription had a very old appearance." Bentson and Olson said: "The inscription had a weathered appearance, similar to the uninscribed parts of the stone." Professor C. O. Curme, a very competent observer, also mentions it. He obtained the loan of the stone two months after it was found in 1897 and had it in his study for three weeks. Shortly after he sent the stone back to Kensington, he was interviewed by a representative of one of the Chicago papers and this is what Curme told him: (16)

Wherever the characters of the inscription have not been disturbed, they have precisely the same color as the general surface of the stone. But it can be plainly seen that most of the letters have been scratched over with a sharp instrument after the stone was unearthed.

(11) Minn. His. COLLECTIONS, Vol. XV., pp. 236-7; H. R. Holand, WESTWARD FROM VINLAND, 130-1.

(12) The statement is on file in the archives of the Minn. Historical Society.

(13) REFORM, April 29, 1926. The whole letter is printed in Holand, WESTWARD FROM VINLAND, p. 132.

(14) PROBLEMET OM NORDBOER I NORDAMERIKA FOR COLUMBUS, Copenhagen, 1951, p. 67.

(15) IBID. p. 71.

(16) SKANDINAVEN, Chicago, May 3, 1898.

The letters of the inscription were evidently carved with a sharp instrument, because they are clearcut and distinct in outline. But the fact that the upper edge of the incised lines is rough and rounded as a result of the disintegration of the stone, while the bottom of the scratched incisions is sharp and clear shows plainly that many years must have elapsed since the inscription was cut.

In other words, the external appearance of the stone, so far from speaking against it, is such that the inscription may well be 600 years old.

This testimony is the more significant because Professor Curme was not a supporter of the authenticity of the inscription. Breda had persuaded him that its language was not Old Norse, as Breda erroneously claimed it should be.

If we take Brondsted's claim that a full patina could be acquired in 75-80 years, this brings us back from 1897 to 1818 or 1823. But that was a generation before the immigration to Minnesota began and 40-50 years before there were any settlers in Douglas County. This is assuming (as Brondsted apparently does) that the weathering process was active while the stone lay covered by soil; but this assumption is wrong, as shown previously.

A proper understanding of this subject of weathering will find that there are three long periods in the history of this inscription. The first began in 1362 when the inscription was made and the stone was planted in the ground. Here it stood for a long time, a hundred years or much more, and acquired its full patina. The second began when the stone fell down or was overturned, possibly by an Indian who feared that this mystic inscription was bad 'medicine' and therefore laid it face down to check the evil. This period must also have been very long to provide sufficient soil to accumulate around and on top of the stone so that a tree could get started on top of it. The third period was its under-ground position where no weathering took place, and there it remained until the pioneer came.



Route of the Vikings from Norway to Alexandria, Minnesota.



## VI. *The Historical Evidence*

In order to comprehend the historical origin of the Kensington inscription and its date, 1362, it is necessary to take a glance at the conditions in Greenland in the Middle Ages. It was a White Man's country on the southwestern coast consisting of two settlements known as the Eastern and the Western Settlement. As there was a desolate wilderness about 250 miles wide between the two, the Western Settlement was not often visited. There was perhaps 2000 people in the Eastern Settlement and about 500 in the Western. However, these figures are mere estimates. The Western Settlement lay nearer to the best hunting grounds which were located far north.

For about 300 years these two settlements flourished. They were a self-governing little state which got along without war, and the internal political conditions appear to have been peaceful. The hunting was excellent, and Greenland enjoyed a profitable trade with other countries. Walrus tusks were exported in such quantities that the elephant ivory was almost crowded off the market. The Greenland falcons, the best in the world, were famous from Bergen to Bagdad and brought fabulous prices. Kings were glad to pay a fortune for a tame polar bear from Greenland, and the rich of many lands slept on pillows stuffed with Greenland eiderdown. Greenland was a prosperous community.

It was no doubt this prosperity which prompted the King of Norway to seek a closer political union with Greenland. He proposed that if the people of Greenland would accept the laws and government of Norway and become a crown colony, he would provide for the import of their domestic needs by putting two ships each year on the Greenland run. This seemed a promising offer. The Greenlanders needed flour, medical supplies, sweets, and many other things, and if they were delivered regularly, they would want for nothing. Moreover, a union with the mother country would insure military assistance if needed. The royal proposal was therefore accepted in 1261.

But this union proved most disastrous. As Greenland was now a crown colony, all trading with Greenland, except with the King's consent, was strictly forbidden. Furthermore, the two annual royal ships came most irregularly. Sometimes fifteen years would pass by without any ships—the King was occupied with other business. Greenland exports dropped badly, and there was no longer much incentive to go far north for hunting because the pelts were rotting in the warehouses.

The Western Settlement had another problem which the neighboring community was not yet bothered with. This was the encroachments of the Eskimo. These Arctic people play no part in the history of Greenland until the fourteenth century when the Norsemen had their first contact with them.

It was inevitable that hostilities would break out between the Norsemen and the Eskimo. No provocation to war is more common than the struggle of two primitive peoples for the same hunting grounds. This is abundantly illustrated in the narratives of the early French missionaries and fur traders in America. The Eskimo felt particularly resentful because the white men had iron weapons, better adapted for hunting, and ships in which they could come from hundreds of miles away and sail back with their booty. Little is known about the progressive incidents in this contest for survival, but we can easily imagine them.

The Eskimo probably made no attack in force, because they were not familiar with such tactics, and the problem of providing food for a large war party so far from home would be difficult. Instead, they resorted to sniping, the timid man's mode of violence. The Norsemen lived on scattered farms, separated by ridges and marshes, and the cattle strayed far. It was easy for a few Eskimo to kill these cattle, to set fire to distant haystacks, far from the farmhouse, and to ambush any lone man that appeared.

The people of the Western Settlement were driven back in the same way. They gathered in groups and went in search for their enemies, but they never saw any. But at home silent death lurked behind every rock and hillock. On Sundays the people did not even dare to go to church for fear that their homes would be destroyed by fire in their absence.

This situation was unendurable. To live in such constant fear was worse than death. It was imperative that they move away without delay. But where could they go? They could not go to the Eastern Settlement, because that was already crowded, and they would hardly be welcome in Iceland or Norway. But what about Vinland, where their ancestors had once settled, or Markland, where timber was obtainable? To move away was a serious problem, but to stay was impossible. So eventually came the day when their settlement lay empty and despoiled.

This is told by Father Ivar Bardson, a Greenlander, who visited the Western Settlement in 1342. He was a priest in the Bergen diocese and was sent to Greenland by his superior, Bishop Hakon of Bergen. The Bishop had not heard from his friend and schoolmate, Bishop Arni, in Greenland, for many years. In 1341 Bishop Hakon fitted out a ship at his own expense and sent Father Ivar to Greenland with greetings and many presents. Ivar reached Greenland in safety and found Bishop Arni still alive, but very old and feeble. At the Bishop's request, he remained as steward of the properties of the church. He learned that the people of the Western Settlement were having trouble with the Eskimo, and the next year, 1342, he joined a company of men who were sent to their aid. The following is part of his report dealing with this mission: (1)

. . . There in the West Settlement stands a large church called Stensness (Sandness) Church, which church for a time was a cathedral and episcopal see. But now the Skrellings (Eskimo) have occupied all the Western Settlement, there are many horses, goats, cows and sheep, all wild, but no people, neither Christian nor heathen. All this was told us by Ivar Bardson Greenlander, who was in charge of the episcopal see at Gardar for many years; he had seen all this.

This is what the seventeen Greenlanders who went to Norway in 1348 reported to the King as mentioned before.

The King must have been much disturbed by this news, but at the time he could do nothing about it. He was about to embark on his first campaign to compel the Greek Catholics of Russia to accept the Roman Catholic faith. To accomplish this he prepared one campaign after another with indifferent success.

But six years later his attention was again called to the plight of the Greenlanders: Moreover, he was now informed that the exiled Greenlanders had given up the Christian faith and had become idolators (2), and he determined to do something about it. This is clearly indicated in his forceful commission to Sir Paul Knutson, dated October 28, 1354. (3) In this letter he instructs Sir Paul to select a group of good men, including members of the King's Bodyguard, to go and find the lost Greenlanders. Greatly disturbed, the King writes: "We ask that you accept this our command with a right good will for the cause, inasmuch as we do it for the honor of God and for the sake of our predecessors who in Greenland established Christianity and have maintained it to this time, and **we will not let it perish in our day.**"

(1) GRONLANDS HISTORISKE MINDESM. III, p. 259, also printed in PURCHAS HIS PILEGRIMES, London, 1625, Part III, 518 ff.

(2) This is mentioned in a late copy of an Icelandic Annal and reads thus: "1342. The inhabitants of (western) Greenland fell voluntarily away from the true faith and the Christian religion, and, after having given up all good manners and true virtues, turned to the people of America. Some say that Greenland lies very near the western lands of the world" (i.e. America).

(3) The letter is printed in full in H. R. Holand, EXPLORATIONS IN AMERICA BEFORE COLUMBUS, p. 156.



We have no substantial report on the results of this expedition, but there are various fragmentary items which show that it actually took place and in part returned to Norway. Archbishop Olaus Magnus testifies to the return of the expedition. He says that in 1505 he visited the Cathedral in Oslo and was there shown two Eskimo kayaks which had been placed within the church over the main entrance as a memorial of a royal expedition to Greenland in King Hakon's time. (4) (Hakon, the son of King Magnus, was King of Norway from 1355 to 1380). The reason why these skin boats were given a prominent place in the cathedral could only have been that it was a memento of the crusade to reestablish the Christian faith in Greenland.

There is also the fact that the death of Bishop Arni in Greenland did not become known in Norway until in 1364, whereupon a new bishop was appointed in 1366. As private trading with Greenland was strictly forbidden, this shows that a royal ship returned from Greenland in 1364. This royal visit was no doubt one of those sent to Greenland in 1355 to re-establish Christianity there.

For these and other reasons, Gustav Storm concludes that the expedition sailed as planned and returned (at least in part) in 1363 or 1364. (5) Furthermore, we have the testimony of Nicholas of Lynn that he with Ivar Bardson returned from America to Bergen and presented reports of the expedition in 1364. This is told in the last chapter of this book. Even Nansen who is exceedingly skeptical about early Norse sailings to America recognizes this expedition and says: "perhaps it is not altogether impossible that the intention was not only to strengthen the possessions in Greenland, but also to explore the countries further west." (6)

(4) HISTORIA DE GENTIBUS SEPTENTRIONALIBUS. 1555, Book II, Ch. IX; H. R. Holand, EXPLORATIONS IN AMERICA BEFORE COLUMBUS, 158-159.

(5) STUDIER OVER VINLANDSREISERNE, Oslo, 1888, p. 73-74.

(6) IN NORTHERN MISTS, p. 38.

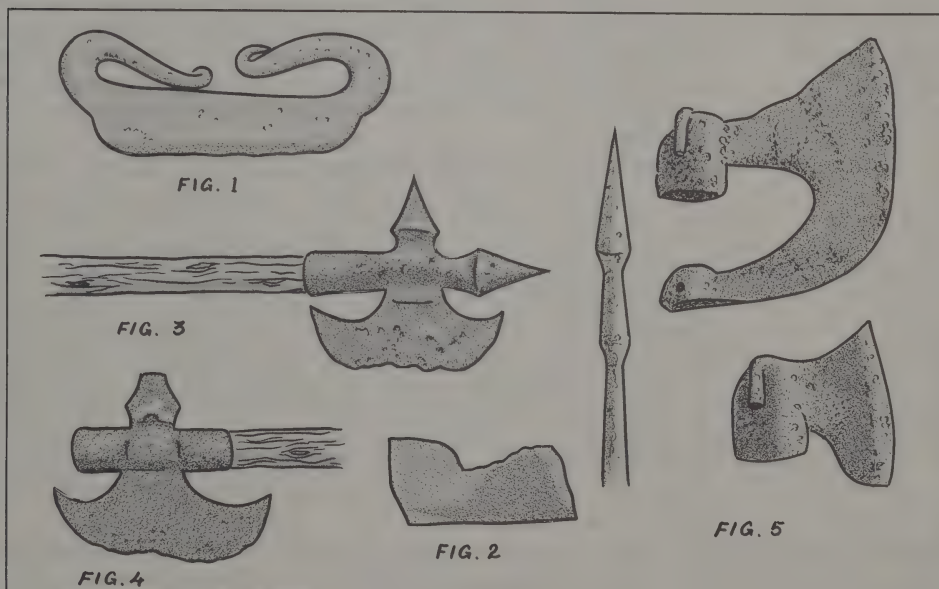


FIG.1 —The Cormorant Lake fire-steel. FIG. 2—The Cormorant Lake axe. FIG. 3—The Wells, Minnesota halberd. FIG. 4—The Alexandria, Minnesota halberd. FIG. 5—Other 14th Century implements found in Western Minnesota.

## VII. Mooring Stones and Camp Sites

A mooring stone is a large boulder or part of a rock formation on the shore of a lake or fjord, in which is a chiseled hole, several inches deep, for the purpose of holding a ringbolt. Its purpose is to serve as a pier for mooring a boat. In Norway and Sweden where there are many fishermen, and where the water is often deep right up to the shore, making it difficult to build a pier, there are hundreds of mooring holes. They are also common on the rocky shores of inland lakes in these countries. Their use goes back to the remotest antiquity. (1)

In the interior part of America, no mooring stones have been found, except in Minnesota and on Lake Winnipeg. They are not widely scattered, but are all (with one exception on Lake Winnipeg) found along a meandering waterway from Hawley in the northwestern part of the state to Sauk Centre in the central part. The holes are about an inch in diameter and from four to seven inches deep. They could not have been left by the early pioneers because their boats were home-made flat-bottomed punts which could easily be pulled up on shore, nor did the early furtraders need any piers because they traveled in light birchbark canoes which could easily be picked up and carried from place to place.

But why should these men have used mooring stones? Could they not have tied their boat to a tree on the shore?

A boat big enough to carry twenty men must have weighed more than 1000 pounds; and they probably had several hundred pounds of freight. To drag such a heavy boat up and down across a stony beach would be most unwise because of the possible damage to its bottom. Still worse, it would be a death trap in case of attack. To launch such a heavy boat would require the efforts of all the men, and they would probably all be dead before the boat was afloat. It was much simpler to make a mooring hole, the work of only a few minutes for a man familiar with a chisel and hammer. In case of an attack by a big party of enemies, the men could make a run for the boat, the last man in would flip out the ringbolt, and they would be afloat.

In northwestern Minnesota are thousands of lakes and rivers. But, as shown below, the mooring stones are found only in a very limited area where a line drawn from one lake to the next marks a passable and fairly direct waterway down through a large part of Minnesota from northwest to southeast. **All the mooring stones are on this line.** This shows that at some time in the remote past a party of men traveled in a large boat from Lake Winnipeg to Kensington and beyond. This fits the explorers of 1362 because they left an inscription which says they came from the north, from the ocean. The only ocean north of Minnesota is Hudson Bay. Moreover, they even gave the distance to this ocean. The inscription says it was 14 **daghrise**. A **daghrise** or days' voyage was based on the average day's sail or 75 miles. (2) Fourteen times 75 equals 1050 miles which is the approximate distance from the spot where they left the inscribed stone to Hudson Bay at the mouth of Nelson River. We will now briefly follow their voyage to each of the mooring stones.

A bonafide mooring stone has been found on an island in the harbor of Barents River on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. The finder was Ewald Hanson whose address is Barents River. A search for other mooring stones north and south of Barents River is planned.

(1) See C. G. Styffe, *SKANDINAVIEN UNDER UNIONSPERIODEN*, Stockholm, 1911, pp. 115, 329-30, Olaus Magnus describes and illustrates them in his *HISTORIA DE GENTIBUS SEPTENTRIONALIBUS*, Rome, 1555, Liber II, Cap. XIII.

(2) Holand, *WESTWARD FROM VINLAND*, p. 16 n. 6; Vigfusson, *ICELANDIC DICTIONARY*, art. *DAEGR*.



On reaching the south end of Lake Winnipeg, the travelers entered Red River which leads south for 350 miles. It was **not** necessary to drill a mooring hole on the bank of a river because the boat could be moored to a tree on the bank. For this reason no mooring stones have been found along Red River.

As these travelers presumably were attempting to return to their headquarters in Vinland which was far in the east, they would look for a waterway which led east or southeast. Near the south end of Red River they would come to Buffalo River, a large stream leading straight southeast as far as they could see. About 35 miles up this river is a big bend, and the area southeast of the bend was a lake or a string of lakes (now drained by a county ditch). On the south bank of this watery area mooring stone number one was found. It is seven miles straight south from the village of Hawley.

As the land to the south and east of this mooring stone rises rapidly to a height of 300 feet above the valley floor, the travelers found they had gotten into a dead end. They therefore returned to the river and continued northeast for a short distance. Here, about three miles northeast of Hawley, was formerly a small lake, and on the south side of this former lake lies mooring stone number two.

A little distance above this lake the river divides in two. If we follow the south branch we come to Stinking Lake. Just inside of the opening of this lake is the third mooring stone. This part of the journey must have been very laborious because this branch of the river is small with many big boulders to obstruct their progress. We see this difficulty reflected in the distance between these two campsites — only three miles. It was perhaps the hardest day's labor of all they had.

From this stone the course is open southward for about ten miles through a string of lakes and creeks. Then we come to a ridge about forty feet high which is the dividing watershed between the Buffalo River basin and the Pelican River basin. Here a portage of a quarter mile was necessary. On completing this portage they came to a lake called Nelson Lake or Tub Lake. Here is mooring stone number 4. This lake empties into West Cormorant Lake which was connected with Big Cormorant Lake (the lake with two skerries) where mooring stone No. 5 was left. Here is where disaster overtook the travelers and ten of them were killed. This lake empties into Pelican Lake where we find mooring stone No. 6, just above the outlet into Pelican River. These six mooring stones probably mark the campsite of six successive days not including Sunday.

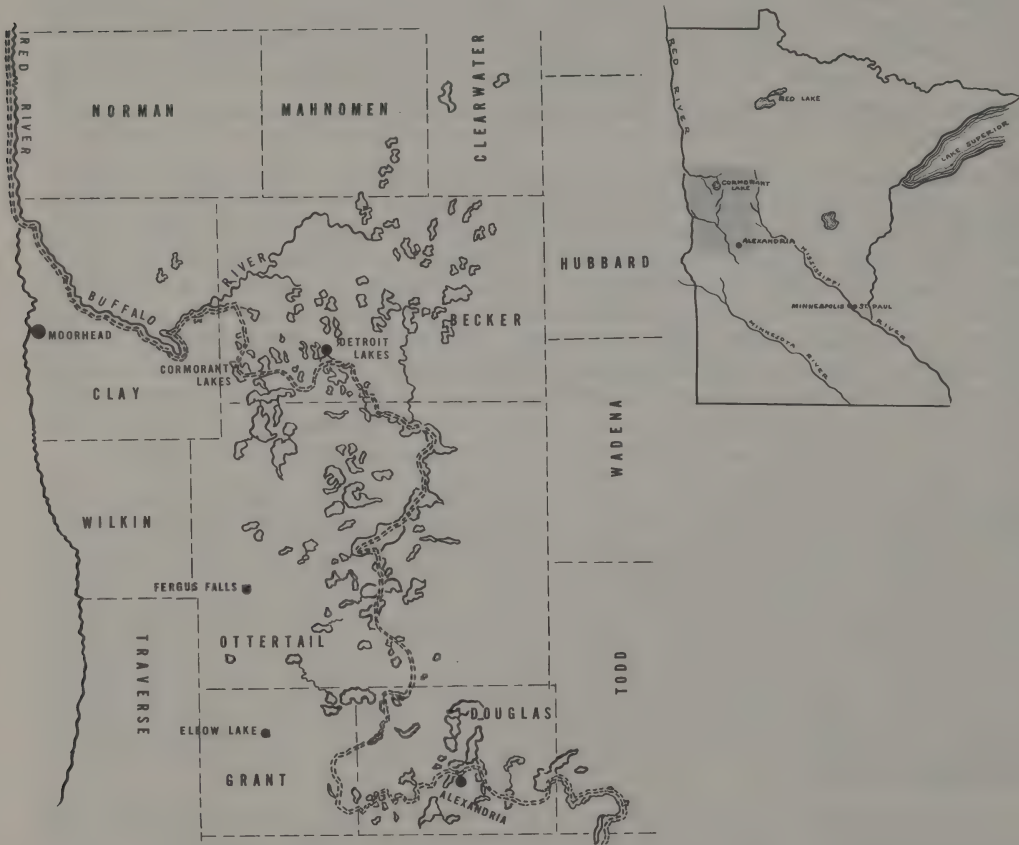
Passing down the Pelican River, the explorers had an easy glide for about fifty miles until they reached Dayton Falls about four miles west of the present Fergus Falls. Here the river, now augmented by the Otter Tail River, turns abruptly west. As this would carry them farther into the West, they probably turned eastward through a chain of lakes which brought them to Swan Lake, where they found the Pomme de Terre River leading southward. At Ten Mile Lake they camped and left a mooring stone No. 7. Continuing southward, they came to Barrett Lake where they very likely left a mooring stone, but the shore of this lake has not yet been inspected. From Barrett Lake a series of lakes and lowlands continued to "the island" where they left the inscribed stone. Here they also left a mooring stone, No. 8.

From here a chain of lakes leads eastward where, on Lake Jessie, they left the ninth mooring stone. A slough leads eastward to Lake Osakis where the tenth mooring stone has been found. Sauk River drains Lake Osakis and leads to Sauk Lake. Near the lower end of this lake is an inlet which leads up to a huge rock twenty-seven feet long and curved like the chancel of a church. This similarity appears to have prompted them to go to extra labor in preparing for their weekly mass because indications point to a real altar in the wilderness. (3)

(3) This is fully described in Holand, *AMERICA* 1355-1364, 1946, pp. 166-177. The mooring stones are more fully described in Holand, *EXPLORATIONS IN AMERICA*, 1956, pp. 156-177.

No mooring stones have been found below the last mentioned. They were now on a river which joined the Mississippi, and no mooring stones were needed.

There are four facts which indicate that the mooring stones were left by the explorers of 1362. 1. This method of mooring boats was not used by the early settlers or furtraders. 2. The chiseling antedates the arrival of the first settler in each location. 3. Two of these stones were found precisely on the two spots mentioned in the inscription, namely the place of massacre and the "island" where the stone was found. The other mooring stones were all found on the waterway leading to and from these two sites. 4. The weathering of the holes is so old that the chisel marks have entirely disappeared.



Route of the Vikings in Northwestern Minnesota.

Shaded area in Minnesota shows area visited by the Vikings.



## VIII. Fourteenth Century Implements

The publicity which the Kensington Stone received during the half century of discussion concerning its merits produced a large number of letters from different parts of America, in which the writers tell of old finds they had made or heard of. Many of these finds proved to be Indian copper implements and some silver crosses presented to Indian chiefs. But among them were also iron implements of antique shape, which proved to be of late medieval Scandinavian origin, that is, from 1200-1500. Nearly all of these dozen weapons and implements have been found in Northwestern Minnesota.

A frequent reaction to these discoveries is that their presence is due to the many Scandinavians in northwestern Minnesota.

This explanation is superficial. North Dakota has the largest percentage of Scandinavians of any state in the union, but only one medieval object has been found, and that was right on the border line of Minnesota (see No. 2 below). Northern Illinois and Kansas have large settlements of Swedes, but no old Swedish arms have been found in these states. The densest concentration of Scandinavians is found on both sides of the boundary line between Iowa and Minnesota, extending into Wisconsin where there are several counties north and south of La Crosse which are predominantly Norwegian. In this very thickly populated area are many times more Scandinavians than in northwestern Minnesota, but only one ancient weapon or implement has been found.

There are six implements which cannot have been brought in by any pioneers because they were in their finding places when the very first settlers came. These six are as follows:

### 1. The Climax Firesteel

The first settlers in Polk County, Minnesota were four Norwegians who came from southern Minnesota in 1870. They found very fine land near Red River about five miles northwest of the later village of Climax. The next year they moved up with their livestock and families, and for two years they had no neighbors within thirty miles.

In the summer of 1871, one of them, Ole Jevning by name, built a fence to keep his cattle at home at night. He used a posthole auger to dig the holes for his fenceposts. At one place he got down about two feet when he heard something scrape against the auger. He pulled it up and found he had struck a little fire-steel. It was much rusted and there was also some charcoal and ashes. This fire-steel was taken to the University Museum in Oslo where it was recognized as a Norwegian medieval fire-steel. This fire-steel found with a layer of charcoal and ashes indicates that Norse people from long ago camped here because it would take hundreds of years for the winds of the prairie to cover this implement and the charcoal with two feet of black soil. (1)

I later visited the spot and found that the fire-steel was found on the bank of an ancient channel of the river, now covered with big timber. Evidently this was a camp site. The present channel of the river is now about a mile west.

### 2. The Ceremonial Halberd

Mr. Jevning had a nephew, the latter well known Esten O. Estenson who lived with his parents about a mile away. In 1871 he was about eleven years old and one day after a heavy rainfall he noticed that the upper part of the river bank had caved in, exposing a vertical cut of black soil. About two feet below the grassy top he saw a small stick projecting. He pulled on the stick and out came a very strange looking axe. (see Fig. 14B on page 137, "Explorations In America Before Columbus.")

(1) This and the other implements described below are more fully described in Holland, EXPLORATIONS IN AMERICA and WESTWARD FROM VINLAND.

It was first thought that this "axe" was an Indian trade article, but after sending photographs to all the leading museums in the Middle West, East and Canada, this theory proved erroneous. As Charles E. Brown, Curator of the Wisconsin Historical Society Museum, says: "No such implement is listed in any of the fur-trade invoices I have seen. In its expensive construction it is unlike all other trade articles. Moreover, the slender handle ( $\frac{7}{8}$  inch) makes it worthless as an axe for Indian use. It looks to me like an ancient Norse weapon." (2)

Brown had in mind the Norse halberd which Sommerfelt and Knudsen describe: "The Norse halberd . . . of the 14th and 15th centuries had a long handle of wood which ended in a spearhead, and below this was an axe blade in the shape of a half moon. Opposite this was a pointed axe hammer." (3)

This describes the implement well, but this 'halberd' seems too light for warfare. The blade weighs only a pound, and the handle is less than an inch in diameter. As it is too light for warfare, it is probable that it was made only for ceremonial usage. The halberd has always been a favorite ceremonial weapon. It is so used at present by the Swiss Guard at the Vatican. The **Century Dictionary** defines the word **Halberdier** thus:

A soldier of the bodyguard of a sovereign or high official . . . The halberd was commonly borne by such attendants rather as an official badge than for actual service.

It may therefore be assumed that, just as the lictors of Rome carried the Fasces as an emblem of Consular authority on their errands to distant officials, the members of King Magnus' bodyguard, who were his official representatives, carried a light halberd as a sign of royal authority. These artistically shaped ceremonial halberds with their graceful curves, their surface shining like silver, would make an ideal symbol.

It must have taken hundreds of years for the winds of the prairie to build up two feet of soil above it.

### 3. The Alexandria Halberd

A similar halberd of the same size but badly battered by hard usage, was found a couple of miles north of Alexandria. A summer resorter from St. Louis built a house on the shore of Lake Darling and found it necessary to remove a very large oak tree, the age of which was estimated "at least 200 years old." Underneath this tree, three feet below the surface, the halberd was found. (See Fig. 14c, page 137, "Explorations in American Before Columbus").

### 4. An Old Fashioned "Beard" Axe

On page 138, Fig. 16, in the book, "Explorations In America Before Columbus" is seen a battle axe having a cutting edge sixteen inches long. This was found on a small island (now a peninsula) in Norway Lake in Kandiyohi County, Minnesota. This former island has never been plowed or occupied except by Indians, being only a few square rods in size. In 1908 a farmer in the neighborhood was fishing near the island, and, being chilly, he landed to take some exercise. He noticed a small piece of rusty iron sticking up and pulled it out. It was a strange implement to him and he did not recognize it as an axe and left it where he found it. Two years later he read an article in his newspaper about the Kensington Stone and, thinking the unknown article on the island might have some connection, he went back there and found it where he left it.

In the ceiling of Kumla Church in West Gothland, Sweden, is a late medieval painting showing the death of King Olaf in the battle of Sticklestad. In this painting are shown two axes like the one found on the island in Norway Lake. In the foreground is seen the King as he is struck in the knee by such an axe.

(2) The statement is printed in Holand, **EXPLORATIONS**, p. 138.

(3) **NORSK RIKSMALSORDBOK**, Oslo, 1939, p. 1762.



## 5. The Erdahl Axe

The discovery of this axe is well described in an affidavit by the wife of the finder. She writes: (5)

Minneapolis, Minn., Dec. 11, 1928.

About thirty-five years ago my late husband, Julius Davidson, and I purchased a farm about five miles southwest of Evansville, Minn. Being in need of more tillable land, Mr. Davidson in 1894 decided to clear and break up part of a piece of woodland which was on the farm.

The trees had been cut some years before, and the stumps were pulled up by means of a stump-puller. Beneath one of these stumps he found a heavy axe of strange shape, the like of which he had never seen before. The top of the stump under which the axe was found was more than two feet in diameter, and my husband said it must have been several hundred years old. The axe lay quite deep in the hole about a foot and a half below the surface of the ground. None of our neighbors had ever seen or heard of this axe before.

Martha Davidson

This is a battle axe, no good for cutting, because the blade is almost an inch thick, one inch from the edge. It weighs 5½ pounds and was effective in crushing helmets. (6)

## 6. The Whitehall Spear

This was found near Whitehall in Trempealeau county, Wisconsin. The following is a sworn statement by the finder:

In the Fall of 1899, while breaking up some new land on my farm in Sjuggerud Coulee, town of Pigeon, I found an ancient steel spearhead. It was actually found by my adopted son, George Windjue, then about five years old, who was playing about and saw the spearhead turned up by the breaking plow.

The spearhead was covered with a thick layer of rust, but by filing and polishing I removed this rust except what is honeycombed into the metal. It is 15 inches long having a blade about 7 inches long. No part of this farm of 120 acres had been farmed or cleared until I bought it in 1893.

Nils Windjue.

I visited museums in England, Holland, France, Germany and the Scandinavian countries, looking for similar spears, but only in the last did I find any of this type. In the museum in Lund I found about a dozen.

One significant thing about these relics is their finding places. They are not scattered all over the state, but most of them are found in the same area where the mooring stones have been found. In fact, several of them have been found right on the camp sites. As most of these implements would be useless to the Indians, they were left at or near the spot where they were found. But when the spear was found, the finder was happy because the spear, even when made of stone, was a favorite weapon of the Red Man. This fine, strong and sharp spear must therefore have been a real treasure and it is likely that it caused many fights as it passed from victor to victor. This explains how it was finally found so far from the spot where the men of 1362 lost it.

These six implements are all Scandinavian in origin and medieval in time. Their evidence of the presence of a company of Norsemen in Minnesota several hundred years ago cannot be argued away. Each of these finds is proof of this fact.

There are a number of other weapons and implements found in western Minnesota, but the circumstances of their discovery do not exclude the possibility that they may have been brought in by early settlers. They are therefore not included as archeological evidence. They include three firesteels, two halberds, one sword, three heavy axes like number 5 above, and two small axes. But the fact that they are nearly all found in this small area is significant.

(5) Her statement is printed in Holand, *WESTWARD FROM VINLAND*, p. 222.

(6) A picture of a similar axe is shown in an illustration from an Icelandic ms. of the Middle Ages. See F. Nansen, *IN NORTHERN MISTS*, II, 15.

## IX. The Testimony of Nicholas of Lynn

For thousands of years people knew little about their fellow men in foreign lands. America, Australia and most of Africa were unknown, and also the innumerable islands of the sea. Seafaring men had no compass or astrolabe to guide them, and the sea was reported full of dreadful monsters, the minions of the surly Poseidon, Lord of the Sea. For these reasons shipping was largely confined to coastwise sailing. It was not until about 1300 that the magnetic needle came into use, and shortly afterward the astrolabe was invented. With these new aids the oceans lost their terrors, and a great era of exploration began.

The astrolabe is said to have been invented by Nicholas of Lynn (King's Lynne) in Norfolk, England. He was a Franciscan friar reported to be a famous mathematician and astronomer. He made an astrolabe for John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the principal English patron of the arts in the fourteenth century. Nicholas also wrote a book entitled *Inventio Fortunata* (The Successful Discovery) in which he describes a voyage to sub-arctic parts of America about 1360. As this was before the art of printing was invented, there were only a few copies made, and the book is now lost. But it is mentioned by many writers, such as Ferdinand Columbus, who says that one of the things which encouraged his great father, when the latter was planning his western voyage, was the mention in the *Inventio Fortunata* of islands in the West. (1) The great Las Casas also mentions the *Inventio* (2) as do many other old writers. Modern experts on arctic exploration, such as F. Nansen, Axel Bjornbo and De Costa mention Nicholas and his book with respect, and E. G. R. Taylor in her *Tudor Geography* calls Nicholas "the outstanding figure of the fourteenth century" in geographical writing. (3) Jon Duason gives Nicholas a searching study in his *Landkonnum og Landnam Islendinga i Vesturheimi*. (4) The *Dictionary of National Biography* gives a partial summary of what is known of Nicholas of Lynn. (5)

The earliest surviving mention of the *Inventio Fortunata* is an annotation on the map of Johan Ruysch dated 1508. This speaks of the discovery of the magnetic pole as an accomplished fact:

"In the book, *De Inventione Fortunata*, it may be read that below the arctic pole there is a vast area of magnetic rock 33 German miles in circumference. Below this is the *Mare Sugenum* (the whirling sucking sea) which pours out waters from four mouths. Around it (the magnetic pole) extensive desolate mountains surround these islands. There are no human habitations. No ship can get away (from the magnetic area) if it carries iron, and no wind will help it."

The following quotations are from the learned scholar, John Dee, and the cartographer, Gerhard Mercator, as reported by Richard Hakluyt: (6)

The Testimonie of the learned Mathematician, master John Dee, touching the voyage of Nicholas De Linna.

Anno 1360 . . . a friar of Oxford, being a good Astronomer, went in companie with others to the most Northern Islands of the world, and there leaving his company together, he travailed alone, and purposely described all the Northern Islands, with the indrawing seas; and the record thereof he at his returne

(1) DELLA VITA DELL' AMIRAGLIO CHRISTOFO COLUMBO, Venice 1571, p. 21.

(2) HISTORIA DE LAS INDIAS, COLECCION DE DOCUMENTOS in EDITO, Tom. LXII, 99.

(3) Page 3.

(4) Reykjavik, Iceland, 1941, 163-181.

(5) Volume 40, p. 418.

(6) Edition of 1903, pp. 301-304.



delivered to the King of England. The name of which book is *Inventio Fortunata*, which book begins (in the description) at 54 degree and goes as far as the pole.

The following is Hakluyt's copy of Mercator's inscription on the margin of his map of 1569 and it adds a few details:

Touching the description of the North partes, I have taken the same out of the voyage of James Cnoyan of Hartzevan Buske . . . The most part, and chiefest things among the rest, he (Cnoyan) learned of a certain priest in the King of Norwayes court, in the yeare 1364. This priest was descended from them which King Arthur had sent to inhabite these Islands, and he reported that in the yeare 1360, a certain English Frier, a Franciscan and Mathematician of Oxford, came into these Islands, who, leaving them, and passing further by his Magicall Arts, described all those places that he sawe, and tooke the height of them with his Astrolabe, according to the forme that I have set downe in my mappe, and as I have taken it out of the aforesaid—James Cnoyan.

Is this narrative, "which begins at 54 degrees," the truth or is it an elaborate fiction to prove that Brother Nicholas was a great traveler?

It is not a fiction because he says he found that the magnetic pole was a long distance from the North Pole. Moreover, he says it was not a pole but a vast area. In his time and long afterward, it was universally believed that the magnetic needle pointed straight toward Polaris with some small variations not considered important. No one would therefore think of denying this unless he had good evidence against it. That evidence could not be found in the low altitudes far from the magnetic pole. It was the combination of a scientific man with an astrolabe, arriving by chance or otherwise in a far northern part of North America, not far from the magnetic pole, which made its discovery possible. Furthermore, when we compare the facts and dates recorded by Nicholas of Lynn with the Kensington inscription, we shall find that both deal with the expedition—the Royal Expedition of 1355-1364.

### I. Latitude 54, year 1360

Nicholas says he *began* his research at latitude 54. Evidently he must here have seen or found something very surprising, seeing he began a new research at this point. This startling discovery was probably the fact that he here found a far greater declination of the compass—38 degrees—than he had found anywhere else. In England the declination is 12 degrees, but here it was more than three times as great. What could this mean? No doubt he begged the captain of the company to remain there for some time so he could learn if this was only a temporary phenomenon or something else. And, as latitude 54 crosses Labrador at or near Hamilton Inlet, which by far is the best place for hunting or fishing in Labrador, it is likely that a winter camp was made here. This would place his arrival in Hudson Bay late in 1361.

The men who left the Kensington stone must also have been at Hamilton Inlet in 1360 because it would take them the whole open season of 1361 to search the almost 2000 miles of shore along the coasts of Labrador and Hudson Strait before reaching their campsite on Hudson Bay, where they were early in 1362 according to the Kensington inscription.

### 2. The Field of Operations

The only objective mentioned in the reports about Nicholas of Lynn is his search for the magnetic pole. The compass needle at Hamilton Inlet pointed northwest instead of north, and by following its directing finger he would reach Hudson Bay and—if all went well—also the magnetic pole. It is from this northern viewpoint that Nicholas describes Hudson Bay. On the map of Johan Ruysch (1508) he is quoted as saying that below the magnetic pole is a great sea which he calls *Mare Sugenum*, which pours out waters from four mouths. This is a good description of Hudson Bay. It lies immediately below the magnetic pole and is the greatest drainage basin in North America, receiving the waters of one-third of the continent. In spring, when the wind is mostly from the south, these swollen, iceladen tributaries pour out a vast flood which rush northward through the four mouths or straits between the Mansel, Coats and Southampton

Islands and the mainland on both sides thus creating the troublesome current problems in Hudson Strait.

Another description from Nicholas quoted by Mercator, adds the following:

A certain scholar of Oxford reporteth that these four Euripi (currents) are carried with such furious violence toward som Gulf, in which they are finally swallowed up, that no ship is able with never so strong a gale to stem the current, and yet there is never so strong a wind as to drive a windmill. (7)

This is a good description of Hudson Strait's violent current.

George Best (1578) in his narrative of Frobisher's voyage has the same quotation with this addition:

He (Nicholas) says that the land on the Southwest is fruitful and a wholesome soyle. The Northeast is inhabited with a people called Pygnaei. (8)

The only lands in the subarctic which grows timber are the lands southwest of Hudson Bay. They therefore looked "fruitful and wholesome" to Nicholas.

The Kensington inscription also mentions Hudson Bay as a place visited by its men, but its description is from the south. It says that the explorers came from the north, and as Hudson Bay is the only ocean in the north, they came from there. Moreover, the inscription gives the distance to this sea, "14-day-voyages from this island." The term day-voyage was a nautical unit of distance equal to about 75 English miles. (9)

### 3. The Division of the Expedition

Nicholas makes the somewhat surprising statement that the expedition of which he was a member divided in two. Why should it split in two?

Mercator evidently does not understand this because he says that Nicholas left the others and traveled alone "by his Magicall Arts."

However, there was no magic necessary because the Kensington Stone tells how it happened. It states that twenty men decided to go inland, leaving ten men to look after the ships. This gave Nicholas the opportunity to travel about and "describe all those places that he saw." It is easy to understand why most of the explorers went inland. On their northward journey they had traveled for 2000 miles along a very dismal coast—Newfoundland, Labrador and Hudson Strait. One such voyage was more than enough. On the other hand, a voyage overland to their headquarters promised a shorter route and possibly a far more interesting one. Very likely some of these young members of the King's Body-guard had read or heard about Marco Polo's great journey to the wonders of China and would be curious to see if this new continent had any similar wonders to reveal. But as they had no knowledge of the physiography of this new land, prudence dictated the advisability of leaving a door open to return the way they had come, and they therefore left ten men to look after the ships.

### 4. The Return to Norway

The Kensington Stone is dated 1362 and therefore tells nothing of subsequent events. But according to Professor Gustav Storm, the survivors returned to Norway in 1363 or 1364. (10)

Nicholas also returned to Norway in 1364 because he says a report about the expedition was made to the King of Norway in 1364.

### 5. The Greenland Priest

The Nicholas narrative mentions the obscure fact that the priest who delivered the report to the King was not a native Norwegian but a native Greenland. This indicates that he was well acquainted with this priest. But the only priest known in history to be born in Greenland was Ivar Bardson who presented a report to the King when the survivors returned in 1364. (11)

(7) COSMOGRAPHIE, IV, p. 191. Ed. of 1659.

(8) FROBISHER'S THREE VOYAGES, Stefansson's edition, I, p. 19.

(9) Wm. Hovgaard, NAVIGATION OF THE NORSEMEN, Chap. 4.

(10) STUDIER OVER VINLANDSREISERNE, 1888, pp. 73, 74; F. Nansen, IN NORTH-ERN MISTS, Vol. II, p. 38; Helge Gjessing in SYMRA, 1909, p. 124; H. R. Holand, EXPLORATIONS IN AMERICA BEFORE COLUMBUS, 1956, pp. 158, 159.

(11) P. A. Munch, UNIONSPERIODEN; Vol. 1, p. 314. Storm, above, p. 74.



## 6. A Fourteenth Century Map of Hudson Bay

And now we come to the excellent map of Hudson Bay (Mare Glaciale) which appears on the Gemma Frisius globe of 1537. (12) Hudson Bay is supposed to have been discovered by Henry Hudson in 1610, but here, on a globe made seventy-three years earlier, it appears in a likeness so good that the one who made the drawing must have done much sailing all over the bay. Not only is the outline good, but the principal islands and rivers are shown in or near their proper place. In the north end we see Foxe Channel, and in the south is James Bay, somewhat too large. On the east we find the opening to Hudson Strait with the islands near the opening. Nelson River, where the expedition's headquarters appear to have been located, is shown in exactly the right place, and so is the Churchill, the next big river. To be sure, the course of these two rivers is not correct, but Nicholas probably knew nothing about their course as his observations were made only from the shore of the sea.

But is it likely that an Englishman would be a member of a Swedish-Norwegian expedition?

The knowledge of geography and navigation in the Middle Ages was so scant, that all countries looking for new outposts were glad to avail themselves of foreign experts. Thus we see that Spain's greatest progress in the new world was made by three foreign navigators—Columbus, a Genoese; Vesputi, a Florentine, and Magellan, a Portuguese. The first French voyage to America was guided by Verrazano, a Florentine, and the first English vessel sent into the West was commanded by John Cabot, a Venitian. Lynn in Norfolk, England, was the principal port of Norwegian trade in England, and many Norwegians lived there. (13) There was therefore brisk intercourse between Lynn and Bergen, from which the royal expedition set out. Moreover, the Bishop of Bergen, Gisbrikt by name, was an Englishman, and he was no doubt deeply interested in the success of this great religious enterprise to an unknown country. He would therefore urge upon Sir Paul, the Commandant, who also lived in Bergen, the wisdom of securing the service of his famous countryman, Nicholas, in this voyage.

As the twenty men who went inland would leave Hudson Bay as soon as the Nelson River became navigable, which would be about the beginning of July, 1362, Nicholas would have several months in which to pursue his research. More likely he lingered there until the next year, waiting for the return of these men. Thus he would have abundant time to explore the bay and locate the magnetic pole area.

But eventually came the time for his departure to Greenland and Norway. Miss Taylor has found a passage in Mercator's *Cosmographic* in which it is stated that only eight men returned. (14) As the Kensington inscription says that ten men were left with the ships, this shows that two men had died leaving a total of eight men who returned home—a very small number indeed of the gallant company who had set out from Norway nine years before. Two had perished in the Arctic, twenty had disappeared in the dark forest, and almost twice that number who remained at the headquarters in Vinland had perished at sea on their voyage homeward because they never returned.

But while nearly all the men were lost, they left many memorials of the expedition. There is Nicholas of Lynn and his discovery of the magnetic pole, as recorded in the fragmentary remains of his *Inventio Fortunata*. There is also the inscribed stone found near Kensington with its prayer for divine help. The twelve campsites mark their course down through Minnesota, and the many weapons and implements found near the place of their disaster bear witness to their tragedy. And in the East, in the city of Newport, Rhode Island, stands the sturdy stone tower, planned by them to be the first church in the new world, marking the site of their headquarters. All these bear witness to perhaps the greatest enterprise in early American history.

(12) MEDDELELSER OM GRONLAND, Vol. 48, plate 46.

(13) Alexander Bugge, "Handelen mellem England og Norge," HISTORISK TIDSSKRIFT, Oslo, 1896.

(14) TUDOR GEOGRAPHY, p. 3.

# X. Olof Ohman

## The Scapegoat of the Kensington Inscription

Olof Ohman was born in 1855 in Hälsingland in northeastern Sweden. This district is a mountainous land of timber, and only five percent of the area is under cultivation. The principal occupation of its people is lumbering.

Olof's schooling was very limited because there were no schools in the rural districts. However, there was the *omgangsskole*, an ambulatory school held for a week in successive farmhouses, the course lasting six weeks. As the farmhouses were small and the children numerous, they were packed in like sheep in a fold, sitting on the floor when there was room or standing in the corners. There was no equipment, not even a blackboard, and there were no textbooks.

The instruction was 90 percent religious, and the main purpose was to prepare the youngsters for Confirmation. They were taught to read by means of a Bible history—a synopsis of Jewish history culled from the Old Testament. There was also the Confession of Faith and some hymns, and as there were no facilities for learning to write, this expression of thought was almost unknown. History and geography were only briefly alluded to at long intervals. Runic writing was not even mentioned because that had passed out of use several hundred years earlier. Ohman had six years of six weeks in each which was the maximum acquirement in an ambulatory school, making a total of less than nine months.

After Confirmation the young men and women were supposed to do an adult's share in winning a livelihood. Olof toiled as a lumberjack for ten years until he in 1881 emigrated to America. Here, in Douglas County near Kensington, he worked as a farm laborer at a dollar per day. Saving his pennies, he was able in April, 1890 to buy 80 acres of hilly land covered with timber, three miles northeast of Kensington. The price was \$430.00. The land was so rough that it had been shunned by earlier landseekers as being worthless for farming. But Ohman did not grumble. He was a good representative of the stalwart pioneers who laid the foundation for America's prosperity. He wanted a home and a farm, and with his bare hands he created both. That was his accomplishment and it gave him joy and self-respect.

During that long struggle Ohman had no opportunity to improve his education. Henry Moen in Alexandria who was his neighbor says that his father did all the writing for Ohman, both Swedish and English.

This is the man, the critics have decided, who wrote the Kensington inscription. To prove their theory that the inscription is a forgery, they had to find a forger, and as the stone was found on his land, he seemed promising. It was either Ohman or none at all. To those who knew Ohman this accusation seemed ridiculous and a waste of time to refute it. But as many scholars still think he was guilty I will point out some facts which will show that he could not possibly have had anything to do with the inscription.

1. What could have been the motive of a forgery? What purpose could a hard-working stump grubber have in forging such an inscription? There are only two possible motives: he may have planned to play a prank on the community, or he may have counted on selling the inscribed stone for a high price. Neither of these ideas, however, are in the least probable for two reasons.

a. Olof Ohman was not in the least interested in jokes of any kind. He was a serious-minded man, almost stern, thoroughly honest, and only interested in clearing his farm. Even if he, in spite of these circumstances and the lack of learning, had attempted such an inscription, he would have made a short one of a half dozen words which would have stood a much better chance of being believed. Instead, we have an inscription of 224 signs and 220 division marks, each of which was laboriously chiseled on a hard rock.

b. Nor did Ohman attempt to make any money by the sale of the stone. He said he believed the inscription was authentic because the circumstances of its discovery seemed to prove that the stone was in its finding-place long before he came to America; but when it was reported that the learned scholars in the home country said it was a fake, he meekly accepted their verdict and gave me the stone, refusing even the \$5.00 I offered him.

2. If Ohman was the forger, where did he get the information that King Magnus had ordered an expedition to sail to American waters in the middle of the Fourteenth Century? This was important because it provides the necessary historical background for the inscription. The answer of the critics is that he got it from Storm's *Studier over Vinlandsreiserne*, published in 1887 or '88, who adds that this expedition probably returned to Norway in 1363 or '64.



But it is exceedingly doubtful if a single copy of this learned treatise ever found its way to the pioneers in Douglas County, Minn. Moreover, as the inscribed stone was clutched in the roots of a tree seventy years or more old, the royal expedition was known to the writer of the inscription sixty years before Professor Storm alluded to it.

Dr. Bröndstedt suggested that perhaps the tree was not seventy years old; perhaps it was only half that age or thirty-five. But that does not help the matter any because thirty-five years back from 1898 when the stone was found brings us back to 1863. That was eighteen years before Ohman came to America and twenty-five years before Professor Storm called attention to the royal expedition of 1355-64.

3. If Ohman was the forger, where did he get the information that the expedition consisted partly of Goths and partly of Norwegians? As late as 1909 this idea of two nationalities joining in one expedition was declared "impossible in any circumstances." This statement was made in print by Helge Gjessig, and Professor Magnus Olsen gave it his written approval. (1)

The facts in the case are these: Up to 1355 Magnus Erikson was king of both Norway and Sweden. In August of that year his son, Haakon, came of age, and by previous agreement with the Royal Council, he became king of Norway. However, King Magnus retained Westfold and Eastfold in southeastern Norway. Meanwhile, Erik, the other son, claimed Sweden and rebelled against his father. Sweden, with the exception of West Gothland, accepted Erik as king and war broke out. Only West Gothland remained faithful to King Magnus. This explains why some of the members of the expedition called themselves Goths instead of Swedes.

4. The inscription contains no less than twelve mystic numerals which were so strange at the time the stone was found that the critics claimed the forger had invented them. How did Ohman learn these signs? When they were seen sixty years ago, Professor Breda in the University of Minnesota could not understand them, and Professor Rygh of Oslo University was only slightly more successful. They were, therefore, believed to have been an invention of Ohman until it was discovered they were of ancient Norse origin.

5. But how did Ohman know that they were in use in the Fourteenth Century? The only evidence for that is found in Ole Worm's Latin work, *Fasti Danici*, published in 1643. Was Ohman also a Latin scholar?

6. Well, I could mention many more impossible attributes of Ohman, but one more will be enough. One thing that has perplexed the critics is their inability to identify the dialect of the writer of the inscription. Almost the first thing that a child learns is his mother's dialect, and it usually remains with him for life unless he spends much time with people from other parts. If Ohman had written the inscription, it would have been written in the Hälsingland dialect which was the only one he knew. Instead, it is the general opinion that it is in a Westgothic dialect. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the eight Goths are mentioned before the twenty-two Norwegians. But there are also some west-nordic characteristics. It is not likely that Ohman was ever in West Gothland which was 400 miles away by the shortest route, nor had he spent any time in western Norway which was more than a thousand miles away. This should therefore be enough to prove that he could not have written the inscription.

When we consider the make-up of the expedition we can see how these evidences of a mixed dialect crept in. The expedition, according to the King's instructions, was made up partly by members of the King's bodyguard. As many of them were from West Gothland, this explains the Westgothic character of the inscription. But there were also men from other parts of the King's domain. The commandant, Sir Paul Knutson, was from Bergen in western Norway, and he would probably choose some men from his own neighborhood whom he knew to be dependable. There were also men from other parts of Sweden and Norway. All these men had been in intimate daily association for seven years, in camp and at sea, in work and at play they were together year after year. It was unavoidable that such close proximity would result in some modification of speech, depending on the popularity and loquacity of the members. Eventually this mixture became the runemaster's personal dialect, and he wrote it as he spoke it.

# XI. Arguments Against the Inscription

In order to clarify the question of the authenticity of the inscription, I shall here recite a list of the arguments against the inscription followed by a presentation of evidence supporting the inscription:

**1. The inscription is a fake because it is not written in old Norse.**

This argument came to a sudden end when the date on stone became known.

**2. The inscription is false because it does not use Roman numerals but a system of his own invention.**

This was first answered by Helge Gjessing, a student at Oslo University, who showed that the numerals on the stone are of ancient origin and were in use in Norway in the Middle Ages. 1)

**3. The inscription uses the decimal system which was unknown in the North in the 14th century.**

This is an error. Hauk Erlendson who lived in Bergen wrote Hauksbok about 1320, in which he included a treatise on decimal notation called Algorismus. After that date it is frequently met with. 2)

**4. If the inscription was written in 1362, it would have been written by a Catholic; but the writer of the inscription was no Catholic because he does not know the proper use of Ave Maria. This was a prayer of adoration; he uses it as a prayer of supplication.**

This is wrong. Originally the Ave was a prayer of adoration, but it early changed to one of supplication which by the 14th century had this form:

Ave Maria, Mother of God!

Pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death!

Samuel Morison mentions an officer under Columbus who wrote his own epitaph. It ends thus: "He begs for charity's sake a Pater Noster and an Ave Maria. 3) We find this same supplication in an ancient poem harking back to the Black Plague (1348-49) which it describes. The refrain that accompanies each stanza reads:

Hjälpe oss Gud aa Maria Möy

Aa frelse oss alle av illi.

(Help us God and Virgin Mary

And save us all from evil.)

The reader will note that this supplication, like the one on the Kensington Stone, is made up of the first line of the Ave and the last line of the Pater Noster.

**5. Kensington, Minnesota is close to the geographical center of the continent, more than a thousand miles from the sea in any direction. No theory to explain the presence of these alleged explorers here is conceivable. This indicates that some local blunderer without knowledge of geography wrote the inscription.**

It is true that Kensington is far inland, but there is (or was) a passable water way which leads from Hudson Bay to the very finding place of the stone, necessitating only a few portages, none more than a half mile in length. 4) The inscription mentions Hudson Bay because two ships and ten men were left there by the explorers. Presumably some of these young men of the Royal Bodyguard had heard of Marco Polo's great discoveries deep in Asia and were curious to see the interior of this new continent that they were exploring. There is also the possibility that they were attempting to return to their headquarters in Vinland by an overland route, just as Robert La Salle attempted to reach the mouth of the Mississippi by way of the Great Lakes.

## 6. LINGUISTIC OBJECTIONS

The most criticized word in the inscription is *opdagelse* (exploration). It is claimed that it could not have been in use in 1362 because it is not found in Söderwall's medieval dictionary (*Ordbok ofver svenska Sproket i Medeltiden*, Lund, 1925). As the compiler of this monumental three-volume dictionary, Professor Söderwall probably knew the Swedish language better than anyone else. I therefore went to him to hear what he had to say about this criticized word. He very kindly gave me two hours of his time which were very profitable. He also gave me the following statement:

1) *Symra*, Decorah, Iowa, 1909, pp. 116-119.

2) P. A. Munk translated the treatise which was printed in *Annaler f. Nord. Oldk.*, 1848, pp. 353-75.

3) *Admiral of the Ocean Seas*, p. 646. See also *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

4) In the days of the big Northwest Fur Company, the main route to west led through Lake Superior to Pigeon River where there was a portage nine miles long.



As far as I know, this word is not to be found in the meager literary fragments of the 14th century. But that proves nothing. As you probably know, these fragments consist chiefly of legal documents and homilies, and it is therefore not strange if a word of such comparatively rare import as *opdagelse* is not found in such writings. The old Norse word for this idea was *leita landa*, but this expression had become obsolete when the great change from Old Swedish to the Swedish of the late Middle Ages took place about 1300. As *Landaleita* was dropped, some other term must have been adopted to express the same thought. The only word we know which fills this function is *opdage*. This was also Professor Indrebø's opinion.

It should be added that the root of this word is *daga* which means "to be revealed". It is found in *Alvismål* in the Elder Edda which is several centuries older than 1362. The change from the passive "to be revealed" to the active "to reveal" would seem easy, just as the word *discover* changed from intransitive to transitive, but there is no way to tell when it happened.

## 7. THE SO-CALLED ENGLISH WORDS

Scandinavian critics claim that five words in the inscription are English. These are *mans*, *from*, *of* *illy*, and *ded*. Evidently they have not considered what the conditions are that promote the adoption of English words into the language of Scandinavian immigrants in America. Professor Einar Haugen is an expert in this field and in his book, *The Norwegian Language In America* he gives a great number of illustrations. In his article entitled *Talt og skrevet i America*, printed in *De Tog et Norge med seg*, he writes:

The words which are commonly borrowed are words from industrial life and politics, that is, words for subjects (and occupations) which Norwegians have in common with their American neighbors. 5)

He adds that words pertaining to religion are hardly ever borrowed. To this can be added words of solemn or serious meaning, such as sickness, death, sin, law, justice, etc.

Two of the words objected to (*from* and *of*) are prepositions, and as these have no meaning in themselves they are never borrowed. Even among immigrants who have acquired a fairly good knowledge of English there are many who still cling to the prepositions of their mother tongue. Moreover, these two prepositions occur frequently in old Norse writings. *Of* is used in the meaning *over*, *through* and *around*. 6) *From* (*frám*) is found from the earliest days of Swedish literature down to the sixteenth century. Söderwall gives many illustrations as do Falk and Torp. 7)

*Mans* is supposed by some critics to be the English plural of *man*, but as there is no such plural in English, it could not have been borrowed there. *Mans* is an ancient word in Scandinavian and is often met with in Snorre Sturlason's *Konungasögur*. It is the genitive singular of *maðr* and has a collective meaning. Thus in the inscription 10 *mans* means a ten-man crew. 8)

*Illy* is another word which does not exist in English and could not therefore be borrowed from it. But it is very common in Norse literature of the Middle Ages. 9) It is a part of the Lord's prayer and as such we find it used in the refrain of a Norse folksong or ballad going back to the Black Death (1348-1350). The refrain reads:—

"Hjælpe oss Gud aa Maria Möy,

Aa fraelse oss alle av illi"

(Help us God and Virgin Mary

And save us all from evil").

*Ded* is thought to be the English *dead* because the word should have been spelled *döð*. But the substitution of *e* for *ö* was very frequent in the Middle Ages according to the expert in Swedish phonetics, Axel Kock. 10) In a letter written by Queen Margaret in 1390 I found two examples of this: one is her spelling of *Lodose* (an ancient town in West Gothland. She spells it *Ledese*. The other is her spelling of the same word which is criticized in the inscription. The sentence reads: *Effthet the henna husbonde her Jens Herne ded er*, which means, "because her husband Sir Jens Herne is dead." 11)

5) Page 232.

6) See Vigfussen, *Icelandic Dictionary*, articles of *and* and *um*; Fritzners *Ordbog*, 88, 867; Falk and Torp, *Dansk-Norskens Syntax*, p. 330.

7) *Ordbok öfver Svenska Sproket i Medetiden*; *Etymologisk Ordbog*, article *fra*.

8) Wm. Thalbitzer, *Smithsonian Misc. Collections*, Vol 116, no. 3, pp. 33-34; S. N. Hagen in *Speculum*, 1950, p. 329.

9) Holand, *Westward From Vinland*, 1946, pp. 308-309.

10) *Svensk Ljudhistoria*, 1906, Vol. II, 38-42.

11) *Diplomatorium Norwegicum* Vol IV, no. 586.

**Rise**—journey. In Swedish Mss. of the 14th century this word is spelled **rese** and **rejse**. Some critics claim that the runemaster attempted to write **reise**, but borrowed his spelling from the English **rise**. But why should he attempt to write a familiar Swedish word with the spelling of a foreign word that has no connection with **reise** or journey? The comment is very far fetched.

I asked Professor Söderwall about this word. He said: "It is not a question of the correctness of the word, but merely of the spelling." That seems to be the best answer, and the spelling of medieval writers was often strange. The following letter from an officer in King Magnus' army in West Gothland was written in 1372. The original is preserved: 12)

Konog Magnus ok Konog Hacon med Gutz naat Konogga j Norreghe ok Suereke helsar jak Tubbe Ereksen odmiu med guth Kunger jak jther thes at jak är skild af Orebro, ak ligger jak ok bithar een suar of thetta bref vm j vilen min thyänest haua ok vilen j mik nokot vnna j Vestrogötland til Noreghes vil jak ey ok jak Kan ey leggo vacata for thy jak hauer myket folk etc.

Here we see such a common word as **konnung** spelled **konog**. **Sverige** is spelled **Suereke**, **Erikson** is **Ereksen**, **kungör** is **kunger**, **ok** is **ak**, **ey** is **eygh**, **annet** is **annot**, **gud** is **gut** and **guth**, etc. Note also **bithar** for **beder** and **jther** for **eder**.

In closing this review of linguistic objections to the inscription, it should be added that there is no unanimity among the opponents. Their objections range from solitary criticisms to complete rejections of the inscription as a 14th century product. The result is therefor nil. This search for what is right and what is wrong is therefore a blind trail which leads nowhere. Dr. Erik Moltke, one of the leading opponents, has been frank enough to admit this in print. He says: 13)

There are many opinions on both sides. Some experts say the inscription is genuine while others say it is false, and it would be difficult to appraise one expert's qualifications above another. One thing, however, is certain, and that is that it has not been proven that the inscription is false, nor has it been proven that the inscription is genuine. Speech is a peculiar living fish, and it is not given to many desk-philologists to get a true grasp on it. What do we know about the spoken language of the 14th century? Very, very little, and that little which we think we know we quarrel about.

The philologist who has given the inscription the most thorough analysis is Professor S. N. Hagen, formerly of Franklin and Marshall College. In closing his 36-page discussion of the Kensington inscription he says: 14)

This inscription should be a perfect joy to the linguist because it is such a delightfully honest and unsophisticated record of its owner's own speech. A forger would have tried to imitate a language other than his own. It is clear that this author tried to imitate no language but his own. In branding this beautiful inscription as a forgery, scholars have thrown away not only an important historical document but also a faithful record of medieval Scandinavian speech. It is fortunately of considerable length, and this has made it possible to test its authenticity at a very considerable number of points.

#### 8. RUNIC OBJECTIONS

Dr. Moltke, who is a runologist, thinks the linguistic discussion has been a waste of time. He believes that a study of the runes proves the inscription to be the work of a modern forger. His arguments were first presented in the *Copenhagen Information*, 16) and later reprinted in other publications. I have given a detailed reply in *Explorations in America Before Columbus*: 17) here I have space for only a few comments.

Dr. Moltke's chief contention is that the runes on the Kensington Stone were derived from the runic calendars or **runstaver** which were in general use up to the 17th century. He is very positive about this. He says: "There can therefore be **not** the slightest doubt that the Kensington scribe has constructed his alphabet by aid of such a Swedish runic calendar."

He claimed support for this conclusion in the runic numerals and declared that "The runic numerals prove **superabundantly** that the inscription is of a late (16th century origin.)" 18)

12) *Diplo. Nor.* Vol. IV, No. 501.

13) *Information*, Copenhagen, Nov. 9, 1949.

14) "The Kensington Runic Inscription," *Speculum*, 1950, p. 340. Professor Hagen is also an eminent runologist. Recently he translated the Skodborg inscription which has been a thorn in the flesh of runologists for many decenniums. See *Acta Philologica Scandinavica*, 1949, Vol. XX, 339-344.

16) Issue of Nov. 9, 1949.

17) Pages 328-336.

18) Both quotations are from *Information*, Nov. 9, 1949.



It was not difficult to show that Moltke was wrong in these two conclusions and in a later article he admits his error very neatly. He writes: 19)

Have we then shown that the inscription is false? Not at all; for while the degenerated calendar runes appear to belong to the 15th and 16th centuries, we cannot ignore the fact that Ole Worm's calendar was from 1328. We have reached that borderland of doubt which is the particular element of this inscription. The alphabet does not seem probable for the 14th century, but on the other hand, it is impossible to disprove it.

Precisely to the same point do we come to when we turn to the numerals. Even in the late medieval inscriptions dates are expressed either by Roman numerals or the number is written out . . . but Holand has succeeded in finding in the parchment literature examples of very early use of Arabic numbers.

Another argument which he considered important is the shape of the rune for *n*. In the 11th century, which was the classic age of runic monuments, the sign for *n* was a vertical line with a diagonal line across it. This is the form for the *n* on the Kensington Stone. Later when runic writing became rare, the oblique line was cut off in the middle and appeared only on the right side of the vertical line. Here, says Moltke, we find "a rune which became extinct in 1100 is used on a stone dated 1362!"

But it did not become extinct. He forgets that we have almost no Swedish inscription from the 14th century except on the island of Gotland and in Scania. But in the woods and fields of most parts of southern Sweden could be seen dignified memorials from former days, and here a man of the Fourteenth Century could get his alphabet. He was presumably one of the eight Goths mentioned in the inscription and a native of West Gothland. Recently all the inscriptions in that province have been photographed and published. 20) Of these 98 readable inscriptions, 81 have precisely the same form of the *n* as is found on the Kensington Stone and only 17 use the sign demanded by Moltke. It therefore seems reasonable that the carver of the stone would use the more common form. Even Moltke is persuaded and sweetly answers, "it would not do to lay emphasis in this form." 21)

Moltke's fourth important objection is the letter *j*. He says: "In his eagerness to have as complete an alphabet as possible the Kensington scribe has constructed a *j* rune. That he should not have done" he adds paternally.

Moltke's objection is based on the misinformation that the letter *j* did not exist until the middle of the 16th century when, he claims, "it was invented by Peter Ramus!" 19) He does not know that Adolph Noreen, 22) Von Friesen, 23) and Kock, 24) all mention that *j* as a consonant was in use in the Middle Ages in the Scandinavian countries. What may be new to Moltke is the form of the rune as it appears in the inscription; but we have it in cursive form in many diplomas from the 14th century. One is a letter written by Queen Margaret in 1370. 25) A facsimile of it is printed in Taranger, *Norges Historia*, Vol. III, Part 1. p. 144, where it occurs twenty-two times. The first character in the letter shows it very plainly. We cannot tell whether the runemaster used the letter as a consonant or as a vowel, but it makes no difference because the *i* and *j* were used interchangeably down to about 1800. A facsimile of part of the letter is shown in my *Explorations*, page 333.

In addition to these four objections, Moltke has a number of minor complaints because there are a half dozen sizes in the inscription which are not true runes but improvisations. But why should these be considered as proof of a forgery? A forger would have a much better chance to make his inscription faultless than a man in the 14th century. If he did not have the complete alphabet, he could find what he needed in a good encyclopedia, with the exception of the runic numerals. He would stick to standard forms because that would not be subject to criticism. If he did not have access to a good library he could change or shorten his message to bring it within the limits of his runic. If his purpose was to fool the public it would be much safer and easier to leave only a short sentence like "Torkel Swenson and Arnfinn Ellefson were here 1362."

But if the inscription was written by a member of the Royal expedition that left Norway in 1355 and returned in 1364, the problem was far more difficult. He may have acquired a good knowledge of runes before he left Sweden, but after seven years of seafaring it is likely that he would have forgotten some of the runes. How many students who took a year or two of Greek in college and then went into business would after seven years be able to write the entire Greek alphabet? It seems to me that these faulty runes speak for the authenticity of the inscription rather than against it.

19) *Danske Studier*, 1949-1950, pp. 45, 47.

20) Hugo Yungner. *Vestergötlands Runinskrifter* 1940, Vol. V.

21) *Danske Studier*, 1949-1950, p. 43.

22) *Nordisk Familjebok*, Vol 12, pp. 1123, 1124.

23) *Nordisk Kultur*, Vol. 6, p. 8.

24) *Svensk Ljuthistoria*, II, 284.

25) *Diplo. Norweg.* Vol I, No. 409.

















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